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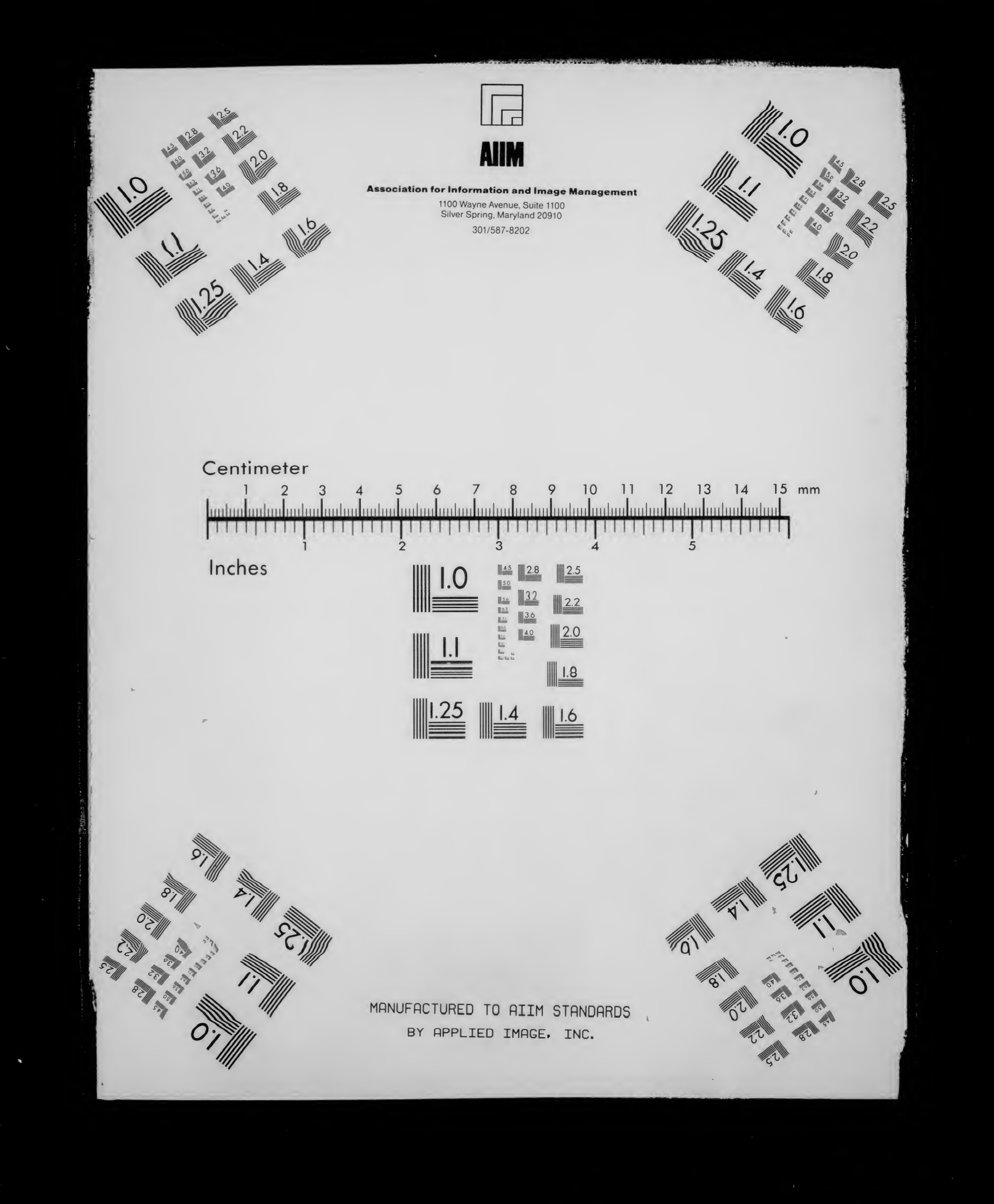
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CHRISTIANITY

BY

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.,

MINISTER OF SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL, AND AT THE ATHENÆUM, CAMDEN ROAD.

Whoso will be great, let him serve.

LONDON:
TRÜBNER & CO., LUDGATE HILL.
1876.

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CHRISTIANITY.

ITS MORNING STAR.

I.

THE homage paid to Christ is a high poetic fact in human history. Even in the Legend of Christ, with all its fables, there are not wanting indications of the profound faith of man in his own higher nature. The poor victim of his own animalism will fain believe that somewhere his nature rose above all that is low and vile. Standing amid physical laws which are as hard walls, the ignorant love to think that at his highest man has been able to master the laws. These are the ideals of ignorant ages which art, science, and culture can alone fulfil. Until nature is recognised as divine there must be a supernature; and no one will speak lightly of the myths of humanity, even when he may become old enough to regard them as childish things.

Priesthoods have gained power over the people through cunning use of their love for their greatest man. But of course no priesthood can rest upon a

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man, or on anything within the reach of every mind's comprehension; so they have made Christ into such a god as is adapted to their purposes. The manhood of Christ, though it is the one thing about him in which all creeds agree, has so far receded before the Shape bearing his name and contrived in the interests of Christianity, that it is called infidelity to speak of Christ as a man. I have no belief that any man can really be interested in the genius or character of Christ so long as he is still under the impression that the Christian scheme embodies him.* That takes him out of the region

* As a rule I prefer the title "Christ," to that of "Jesus," for we cannot be certain that the latter, said to have been the name assigned by the angel, was really bestowed by his parents in childhood. The instinct of Catholic and Ritualist recognises "Jesu" as the more superstitious name. Even if "Jesus" were the original name, it seems to me less characteristic then the title which signs the verdict of the people on the man after his work was done. "Christ" is also a Gentile word, and better symbolises the effect of a life and teaching which broke down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and advanced so far the religion of humanity. Finally, the oriental custom by which nearly all great religious teachers became known in history by other than their family names, reflects in this instance especial honour on human nature to which it is entitled. Those who most distrust the people have never forgotten that they cried "Give us Barabbas instead of him," and we who think of the masses with hope must not forget that when and where the people could give their suffrage free of priestly demagoguism, they voted the same man their King, above all the Cæsars. For "Christ" represents no priestly but a royal title, which Jew and Gentile united to bestow on a poor man whose only claim to kingship was that he bore witness to the truth.

of human interest, whatever interest of another kind it may enlist. It is one of the greatest privileges of free-thinkers that they can study with that calmness which is essential to research, and which is impossible where other aims than to find the fact intervene, the lives of those great men who have been the objects of superstitious veneration. No prejudice, no compulsory creed, no fear of the results of inquiry, can prevent our seeking and stating the simple truth.

Jesus, say all the sects, was a man. They add that he was more—though what they append generally would make him less—than a man. We must pardon the speculation, since so few know what a man is. But it is just that we are all seeking to know, what a man really is; and nothing can better aid us than to learn from the great manifestations of our humanity in such men as Jesus. Let us then inquire what manner of man he really was.

II.

The only materials we have for our inquiry are those supplied by the Four Gospels, with now and then a hint from the Epistles of Paul. From these we must deduct all that can be shown to have been written for a theoretical purpose, or in the interest of any party, school, or sect.

Thus, we can get but little that is descriptive of the

real Christ from such a work as that called "The Gospel according to John." In the first place it is a very late work, belonging to the latter part of the second century, if not later. Its scholastic style of Greek, its frequent ignorance of local usages and places, and neglect of notorious Jewish traditions concerning Christ—whose birth, baptism, and temptation are in it utterly ignored—indicate the passage of the legend into a new habitat. In the anxiety to present a superhuman being all earthly aspects are eliminated. There are also traces in this Gospel of controversies which were unknown within four generations after Christ's death. Thus (John viii., 44) Christ is represented as saying of the Devil, "he is a liar and so is his father." Though the English version has tried to cover the meaning by turning the sentence into bad grammar and worse sense ("a liar and the father of it") the original is plain: *ψεύστης ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ.* Now this notion that the Devil had a father was one of the later phases of the Gnostic philosophy. The Demiurge, employed to create the world and then setting up a rival kingdom, was for the first time associated with the Devil, and suggested as his creator, by Marcion, who taught in Rome during the middle of the second century. In other sentences ascribed to Christ the Marcionite idea of an "antithesis"—the demiurgic confronting the

divine kingdom—is reflected, but here it reaches the later Archonitic development, the Devil being named as the Son of the Evil Creator (as Christ is of the Good God). This conception, which Augustine denounces as Manichæn, could only have been stated late in the second century.

But apart from the late date of the fourth gospel, the writer of it is so absorbed in his main theoretical purpose,—that of making Christ the point of union between the Hebrew personification of Wisdom and the Greek conception of the Logos,—that he does not hesitate to sacrifice everything, even the moral character of Christ, to his end. He represents Christ as attitudinising at the grave of Lazarus. "Jesus wept"; but could those have been genuine tears of sorrow at the death of a man whom he knows he can resuscitate by a word? Then he raises his eyes and says "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." And he adds, "I said that because of the people, that they may believe thou hast sent me; I know that thou hearest me always"—an "aside," confessing that his thanks were meant for effect. This is only a fair example of how Christ is uniformly adapted to a theory in the fourth gospel.

It is indeed enough that it entirely omits the Sermon on the Mount! The homely every-day virtues of that sermon were too human, too commonplace, to

arrest the attention of a speculative enthusiast absorbed in the tremendous work of remodelling the theosophic schools of Egypt and Greece, harmonising their divisions, and solving the problems of ages. Nevertheless, in another direction, this gospel, however untrustworthy for personal portraiture of Christ, is of the highest importance by reason of the spirit of love which it consecrates. It is the very apotheosis of Love. God is Love. Christ is Love. To love is the only test, the only creed, the perfect life. So magnificent is this rapture of love that breathes through the gospel which, no doubt because of it, was inscribed with the name of the disciple called "Beloved," that the warring Jew and Gentile sects seem to have had to touch it here and there in the interest of what they deemed orthodoxy. Thus in the noble utterance ascribed to Christ, speaking to the Samaritan woman, that neither in her sacred mountain nor yet at Jerusalem should the true worshippers gather, but everywhere should they worship in spirit and in truth, a Jewish sectarian has interpolated the words "ye (Samaritans) know not whom ye worship; we know whom we worship, for salvation is of the Jews,"—and this bit of bigotry remains there like an insect in translucent amber.

III.

For our main facts we proceed to what are called the Synoptical Gospels. Of these we may set aside Mark

except for occasional correction of the other two, because it is an evident compilation from them. Now these two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, portray a Christ totally distinct from the mystical Christ of John; and yet their disagreement from each other is very significant, showing very plainly that both are warped—one by a theological, the other by a polemical purpose—even when recording the same facts or traditions. To discover how far the portrait of Christ presented by either was influenced or tinged by the writer's prejudices, we must for the moment dismiss from our consideration the truth or falsity of the narratives, and think only of the colouring given to them.

Taking Luke first, we find pervading his work a jealousy of the Jews. It is well known that the believers in Christ, from the first generation after his death, were sharply divided into two parties,—one wishing to preserve the supremacy of Judaism in the new religion, the other determined that the Gentiles should have an equal or superior part in it. Now Luke presses everything in favour of the Gentiles. The writer addresses his work to a Gentile, Theophilus, and begins by admitting that he was not an eye-witness, but had carefully searched into the traditions transmitted from those who were. At the outset we find Luke tracing the genealogy of Christ beyond Hebrew kings, beyond David where Matthew leaves him, back

to Adam,—that is, to the father of all races, Gentiles equally with Jews. And Adam, he says, was the son of God.

I cannot, at present, go exhaustively into this subject, but will present some of the more salient instances in which the Gentile animus of Luke is shown.* Matthew relates an incident in which Christ is represented as at first refusing the petition of a woman because she was an alien, but afterwards granting it because she humbled herself before the chosen race. "Behold a woman of Canaan came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me Lord, son of David: my daughter is grievously possessed with a demon. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came to him saying, Send her away; for she cries after us. He said, I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not lawful to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she said, Yea, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto

* An admirable series of articles on this general subject, which I hope may at some time be reprinted, were contributed by the Rev. O. B. Frothingham to the "Dial," a magazine edited by myself in Cincinnati, in 1860.

her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt." This is Matthew's account. Mark represents Christ as following the woman's abject words, speaking of her race as dogs, with "for this saying go thy way: the demon is gone out of thy daughter." Now Luke omits this story altogether; but he replies to its insult to the Gentile race, when making up the genealogy of Christ, by giving him two Cainans among his ancestors. This Cainan number two is found nowhere in the Old or New Testaments except in Luke, where it stands as an intensification, grown to a serious claim, that the despised race of aliens, whom the Jews conquered and despised, nevertheless contributed a double supply of blood to the veins of their Messiah.

Luke also omits the charge to the disciples (Matt. x. 5): "Go not into a way of Gentiles, and into a city of Samaritans enter not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." On the other hand Luke replies to this with a story (ix., 52), unknown in Matthew, of how Christ himself sent his disciples—and he is careful to add seventy to the twelve—into a Samaritan village, where the people would not receive them because they were on their way to Jerusalem, and how, when they wished to call down fire upon the villagers, Christ rebuked them. Luke also has the parable of the good Samaritan,—

where the type of charity is chosen from a despised alien tribe,—which Matthew has not. On an occasion when Christ finds unbelief in his own village, he says, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country and in his own house." With Matthew that is all. But Luke makes this the very opening of Christ's ministry, and the occasion of a great manifesto against the Jews and in favour of aliens. According to him Christ's rebuke does not include "his own house," but is national: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when a great famine came upon all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent save unto Sarepta of Sidonia, unto a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, save Naaman, the Syrian." This bold exaltation of foreigners was followed, according to Luke, by an attempt on Christ's life, which he escaped mysteriously,—"passing through the midst of them." That was a cutting satire on the Jewish party.

It is evident from this last phrase which seems to ascribe to Christ the power of rendering himself invisible, and others of the same character, that in Luke there is a transitional conception of Jesus,—a germinating Arianism. Luke cares little if at all for the

Messianic idea. Where Matthew reports the people crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," Luke says they cried "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Luke (i. 35) even interprets the venerable title "Son of God" as meaning simply that the Holy Ghost was his father. He is plainly representing Christ as a sort of demigod. It is remarkable that he alone gives the salutation of the angel to Mary, and it is nearly in the very words of the seer Tiresias to the mother of Hercules,—"Be of good cheer, thou mother of a noble offspring: blessed art thou among Argive women."

We therefore must read Luke with caution, because of his polemical attitude towards the Jews, and because of a slight speculative tendency in the direction of Greek superstitions.

IV.

But how about Matthew? We find in Matthew, as I think, the most primitive conception of Christ, and probably the least biassed report of what was really said and done by him. But this first gospel is also vitiated by a prepossession on the part of the writer. In his firm belief that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews he tries to make nearly every word and action of his fulfil a prophecy. And there is reason to believe that in some cases he unconsciously stretches Christ's

words and recasts his actions in his desire to show him to the Jews as fulfilling all the so-called predictions of the conditions under which the Messiah was to appear and the part he was to enact. Thus he transports the family of Joseph and Mary from Bethlehem to Nazareth for no better reason than the apparent fulfilment of a declaration in the Old Testament that somebody, whom he supposes to be the Messiah, would be "called a Nazarene." It is a blunder which shows the author to have been a judaizing Egyptian-Greek convert. For the passages alluded to (Judges xiii, 5., 1 Sam. i, 11) speak of "Nazarite," one set apart (from *nazar*, to separate) according to Jewish law, and have no reference to the village of Nazareth. In reporting (Matt. xii., 38) Christ's vigourous rebuke of those who demanded "a sign," in which he says no sign shall be given but that of the prophet Jonah, the writer of the first Gospel at once seizes another opportunity for showing a correspondence between Christ and a Jewish type, and makes the teacher add: "for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Christ could not of course have known anything of the legend of his resurrection which was to arise after his death; and, if he made any allusion to Jonah at all—and Mark reports the remark without

it—it could only have been in the simple way mentioned in the third gospel, that as Jonah warned Nineveh he warned his generation. The gospel of Matthew carries its hebraism to an extreme in its fanciful account of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, where he is actually represented as riding on two animals at once—an ass and a colt—because the prophesy had said "Thy king comes unto thee, meek, and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass;" the writer not knowing enough of the Hebrew idiom to perceive that only one animal was meant by Zechariah, —"an ass, even the foal of an ass."

Taking, then, these two gospels—Matthew and Luke—divesting them of their mythology, their improbabilities, and glosses, we are left as best we can to build up for ourselves a probable picture of Christ and some idea of his life and teachings.

V.

In the posthumous work of the late Lord Amberley, "An Analysis of Religious Belief"—a work which, however incomplete, is so full of information that it must awaken in us all fresh regret at its author's untimely death—he lays down a rule which I think is likely to mislead, even though he qualifies it. It is "that wherever we can perceive faults or blemishes in the character of Christ, we may presume them to have

actually existed; for his biographers were deeply interested in making him appear perfect, and they would have been anxious, wherever possible, to conceal his weaknesses." He adds that this principle must be qualified by the consideration that they might have failed to recognise the faultiness, or may have misunderstood him. A perusal of the gospels leads me to the belief that wherever such blemishes are recorded they are generally, if not invariably, expressions of the bigotry, superstition, or partisan feeling of the writers, and that the general high tenour of Christ's mind and character should lead us to give him the benefit of every doubt, and ascribe the fault rather to his reporters than to himself.

Another thing should be said. Because we reject miracles and legends, in themselves, it does not follow that we must reject all the statements wrapped up in them. We must remember that valuable ores are contained in dross. Nay, the dross itself may be characteristic of ores to which it is related.

This last maxim is of especial value when we consider such legends as those relating to the birth and infancy of Christ. When a man has become famous it is natural that inquiries should be instituted about his family and his childhood; and though, in such a case as that of Christ, it is inevitable that a swarm of legends should surround the facts, they may nevertheless hint the truth. Thus it would be very difficult to get up a tradition that a man was born a poor peasant, when his family connection was well known in its own neighbourhood to be of wealth and rank. The traditions would point to the notorious fact. There is, therefore, no reason why we should doubt the indications of the legend in Luke that Christ was born of parents in good position. If the traditions occurred only in Matthew we might suspect he was trying to make out Christ's relationship to royalty; but Luke shows no interest in Christ's connection with David. The sign named to the shepherds by which they should recognise the babe was that he would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes,—a mark, as Calmet noted, of dignity. We are particularly told that Christ's birth in the stable was only because the inn was full. There would appear to be no reason why Joseph should have taken Mary, so near to her confinement, with him to Bethlehem to be enrolled or taxed under the imperial edict, unless she was possessed of some property requiring her personal presence. It is a family which seems to have leisure to travel even as far as Egypt on their own beasts of burthen. In Matthew he is, by our translation, represented as the son of a carpenter; but the word is τεκτων, which may be either a builder or a carver in wood, and in any case does not in the least mean that Christ was of low position.

The probabilities are that Paul stated a well-known fact when he said that Christ, though rich, for the sake of the people became poor. His discourses all show him to have been a man of education, and his conduct is marked by refinement. When he enters the synagogue, even when a boy, the minister gives him the scriptures that he may read to the assembly. And it is probable that the startling effect produced upon the mind of the half-clad popular prophet John, when Jesus came and asked to be baptised, was the high rank of his new convert. "What," he cries, "you come to me! to a man unworthy (by position) to tie your shoes!" Of course, we cannot be sure this was John's meaning, but we can be certain that no coarse or illiterate man ever uttered the sermon on the Mount. Like many other great teachers and radicals,—like Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mohammed, Plato, in the past, and like Knox, Wesley, Wilberforce, Swedenborg, Saint Simon, in more modern times,—Christ would appear to have been a highly-educated and well-connected young radical and enthusiast, who at first aimed to reform the religion of his country, and, that being too strong for him, fought it unto death.

VI.

That this youth was a convert under the preaching of the great revivalist of the time, John the Baptist,

seems to me plain. Although the writers of the Gospels manifest a suspicious anxiety to turn John and his preaching into a mere preface to Christ and his movement, we know from other sources that the wild half-clad prophet in the wilderness had awakened a wide-spread excitement, and it still survives in some Eastern sects, which care little for Christ, and claim John as their founder. Under the Roman occupation of the country, it is probable that a diversion of popular feeling had occurred, and the people in their hatred of the foreigner had sunk into the torpor of indifference as to their intimate religious affairs, under which priestly oppressions and hypocrisies had grown rank. John came laying his axe at the root of this baleful tree. He turned the popular mind again upon the need of religious reform at home, and directed against the priesthood the animosities which had been gathering against Rome. He called men to alliance with the Kingdom of Heaven, and in the mouth of an Essene, as he probably was, that meant something like the early Puritan movement was in England. By its Essene wing Judaism was already in connection with Egypt, and some other foreign regions; and the greater universality of John's revival is indicated by his adopting for all converts the symbol of purification by water which, under the old law, was used only for proselytes from alien tribes. This

already implied the moral kingdom under which Jew and Gentile were included. And this meant a new "cause" and a great agitation, which were sure to bring their adherents into collision with the priesthood. "Presume not any more," cried John, "to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father." He denounces the Pharisees as a brood of vipers.

Now when Jesus was baptised by John, he adopted this new cause. He talked in the same vein. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He also called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers." Some rationalising Christians maintain that Jesus was simply a gentle and good teacher, who went about inculcating a beautiful morality. But it is plain that he was, with John, warrior in a revolutionary cause. It is this fact which explains his demand for a personal following, which has led some to charge him with egotism. It was not to a personal discipleship that he called men when he said, "Come, and follow me," but the word of a captain enlisting soldiers for a struggle. Men and women might be gentle and pure in their homes, but in such an emergency that would not fulfil the need of the hour; they must come out and stand by the hated outcast battling for truth and right, and thereby prove their fidelity to the Kingdom of God. Lord Bacon has remarked that when Christ told the

young man that if he would be perfect he should give away his possessions and come follow him, he did not say he should give them away unless he was so prepared to devote himself absolutely to the new cause. He did not lord it over the young man's conscience, but acknowledged that a good life might be lived by obedience to the moral laws; though the perfect life could be attained only by entire self-consecration to the great cause of truth, and sharing its perils and hardships. Incidentally there is reflected in the absoluteness of the demand the singular extent of Christ's idealism, which disregarded the usual appliances of success—wealth and rank—and trusted only in the pure power of Truth, and the enthusiasm of its adherents.

That, like Wesley and most other reformers, Christ at first tried to work through the existing religious institutions is probable: the traditions of his early preaching in synagogues are clear. They may have been ultimately closed against him, or the crowds may have swelled so that he could only address them out of doors. We know very little of the mental phases and struggles through which he passed in the thirty years preceding his public consecration by baptism to the new kingdom preached by John. But after that he speaks as one who feels himself member of a new society, and by no means realises the

full extent and bearing of the revolution he has espoused. He has rebelled against his class, and taken his place with the humblest religious community, which boasted of the poverty of their prophet, whose food was wild honey and his dress a leathern girdle.

Christ is impatient of anything inharmonious with the equality and democracy of the fraternity he has entered. It is curious to peruse the laborious pedigrees by which the gospels try to connect him with royalty, and the homage afterwards paid by the church to his mother, beside the records of his own repudiation of such things. They tell him his mother and brothers stand outside and wish to speak to him; but he points to his followers, and will acknowledge only them as mother and brothers. "Blessed is the womb that bare thee!" cries a woman; but, with the like impatience, he exclaims—"No! blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." There is a strong infusion of the Essene communism in this, and there are not wanting various early (as I think) utterances disparaging marriage, in which the celibacy favoured by that society is reflected.

But this could have only been transitional with him. "At last he beat his music out"—and great music it was. He was no ascetic against whom it was urged, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." He was no Essene who wove bridal-feasts into

parables; nor was he wanting in sensibility or filial feeling who took children in his arms, was loved and followed by women, and in his last agony asked John to be as a son to his mother.

VII.

The real beauty of Christ's life is just that which is hid by the blind ascription of equal sanctity to all he did and said,—his growth. Slight as the authentic points are, they are points of fire. We see him steadily emerging from sectarian trammels and national prejudices: the smoke of Jewish tradition—Gehenna, devils, angels,—mingling with but never mastering the ever-mounting flame of his thought. It is a Jewish Messiah he sees coming in clouds of glory, but the messianic costume is thrown off when, descended, the judge says nought of Jew or Gentile, but parts to right and left men, as they have or have not fed the hungry and clothed the naked. The hereditary conventional beliefs in his mind decrease until they linger only as superficial garb of his truth: he never makes any prevailing error his main point. It appears to me that some liberals concede too much to that Medusa, Superstition, which turns every thought and emotion of Christ to dogmatic stone, when they admit his responsibility for the demonology, the devil, the eternal hell, incidentally mentioned without denial in

his teachings. Under compulsion to fulfil the *rôle* of the Messiah, the Christ of Christendom is made to give an original and divine sanction to the cosmological notions of his age, which he held as we hold the law of gravitation. The demonology, the great gulf fixed between heaven and hell, were the best science of his age; the Darwins and Huxleys of his time, such as they were, believed them: he was not a dialectical or scientific sceptic engaged in questioning such things. In estimating a great man we should surely look to that wherein he was unique, individual, exceeded his age and added to it. In raising to equal import Christ's mere hereditary mode of expression and the life that was in him—adoring alike body and raiment—the sects are really building as much upon the creed of Christ's crucifiers as on his own! Every Scribe and Pharisee agreed with Christ about Gehenna and Satan. It was not for such views they put him to death. It is to complete their murderous work only too faithfully that the dead Christ should be dragged through the world at the chariot-wheels of that very Messiah-theory which slew him. What Scribe and Pharisee did not believe was in a Father who sends his sunshine and rain on good and evil alike, a Father, we may deduce at length, not likely at any time to rain fires of hell upon his children! What shall be said of those who attribute, to the man

who believed in such a Father, an equally conscious and thought-out agreement with the logical results of the conventional cosmogony which was sometimes the inevitable costume of his thought?

Especially is it interesting to note how from basing his opposition to falsities on the written Law, he more and more appeals to nature and reason. David's eating the shew-bread and man's superiority to the Sabbath are oddly connected for a time; but at length his protest against the Sabbath is based simply upon unresting nature and human liberty.

For his age and country Christ was, perhaps, unique in his method of measuring usage and tradition by real principles. When he warned the youth to keep the commandments, and the young man asks *which*, he does not blindly reply "The whole ten, of course;" he names only five from the decalogue,—all the real and human ones; names none of those that protect Jehovah. For the Sabbatarian command he substitutes "Love thy neighbour as thyself;" instead of warning the youth against "graven images," which he is in no danger of worshipping, he touches his real idol—his wealth; and instead of exhorting him to do the work of Moses' time, he calls him to the great task of his own—to come out there into the street, stand by his side, and toil for the right. How far he carried this rationalism we cannot fully know, for his words

come to us mingled with much that is irrational in his reporters: nevertheless, to the careful eye, his pearl will not be confused with the shell enclosing it. We know that it was a great soul, far above any New Testament writer, which sends us those fine protests against prayer in public places, that relegation of the heart to the closet for its mystical communion with the Highest. Not one of those believers in popular marvels who report him could have invented those exalted poetic interpretations of nature which bid us learn of the sparrow and of the lily, more glorious than Solomon in his splendour, and appealed to men to discern the signs of their own time as for the weather they watched the morning red and glow of evening. It was no believer in a fictitious providence who rebuked the notion that those on whom the tower of Siloam fell were worse than others. And among the few things which, even in the fourth gospel, we can trace back only to him, is that wonderful saying that he will not pray for his disciples, because God needs no prompting of his love; and also that lesson of humility taught by his washing the feet of the humble working men who followed him. These things represent the integrity of a great mind,—the mind of a thinker, a reasoner, a poet. Critics sometimes charge rationalists who believe in the greatness of Christ with selecting from the gospels all that is favourable, and discrediting all that is unfavourable to him. But for one I repudiate that charge. I see plainly that there are some words and actions ascribed to Christ which are inferior to others, while they are in some cases equally authentic. But, believing that Christ was a man, I believe that he grew, and it is our duty to estimate him at his highest, and not at his lowest. I would not, in my humble concerns, like to have what I said as an orthodox preacher quoted against what I believe now. We are entitled in accordance with the laws of human evolution to claim that the Judaic or superstitious utterances of Christ represent a more youthful period of his life than those which are in plain contradiction of them. Thus he says, "The Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat: all things, therefore, whatsoever they bid you, do and keep; but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not." Now I say that is the attitude of a youth in transition,—and why? Because at another time he does what those occupants of Moses' seat tell him not to do, and repudiates them on principle. They tell him to keep the Sabbath; but he—casting, no doubt, a look on ever-active Nature around him—replies, "My Father ceases not his work on the Sabbath, nor do I."

Christ's attention was naturally first arrested by the corruptions with which the priesthood had invested the

ancient religion. He felt the grandeur that lay in that old religion, and supposed that all it required was purification from later corruptions. It is possible that in the ardour of this early aim he might have made the violent attack on the tradesmen in the temple ascribed to him. He denounces the priests for their hypocritical evasions of the Mosaic Law. He finds them appending to the command "Honour thy father and mother" a technical escape from its penalty, which was "He that curses father or mother, let him die the death." His attention not yet turned to the law itself he attacks only their evasion:—"But ye say, Whosoever shall say to the father or the mother, Be that an offering whatsoever thou mightest have been profited by me, he need not honour his father or mother." That is, a man might purchase an indulgence for not supporting his parents by paying a sum of money into the temple. But it is certain Christ did not continue to believe that the established church of his country could be so purified or expanded as to answer the needs of mankind or represent his ideal. The time came when the conviction was forced upon him that of all that edifice not one stone should be left upon another. Not without pangs was the transition completed. Those who have known what it is to wrestle with doubts and misgivings, who have known what it is to break the ties of love and friendship in

order to follow truth and right, can best hear all the pathos of that lamentation that comes across the ages, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The next sentence is significant: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple." That was just such a heart-broken man abandoning finally and for ever the orthodox religion of his time, as you, my friend, may have known in your pilgrimage.

VIII.

The question has long been discussed whether Christ believed himself to be the Messiah of Jewish prophesy and hope. It is a very difficult question to determine, because of the conflicting theories of the New Testament writers which so variously colour what he said. However, my belief is that in this also his mind passed through several phases of belief. At the time when Christ appeared the ancient Jewish belief in the Coming Man had not only been intensified by their subjugation, but modified: they no more looked for the righteous Prince of Peace leading in

the Golden Age, but for a warrior overthrowing the power of Rome. All the more, as the possibility of successful resistance by natural or military means vanished, had they come to rest on the hope of divine interposition in their behalf. Exasperated and universal as that feeling was we could not expect any ardent Jewish youth to grow up without sharing it. Such was the popular state of mind that no prophet or reformer could arise without shaping his reform with reference to the messianic idea. Theudas, Judas, Bar-kochab, and other agitators had appeared, pretended to be the Messiah, and fallen ignominiously when they could not sustain the pretension. John the Baptist escaped the ordeal by confessing that he was only the forerunner of the Messiah. As for a long time every religious radical in Christendom—Fox, Wesley, Swedenborg, Channing—have all shown eagerness to declare their faith the most genuine Christianity, so it was felt as a necessity that every Jewish innovator should prove that he was setting up the only true and genuine Messiaship. This expected kingdom might be conceived variously, but it always involved the supremacy of the Jews over all other nations. The enlightened Jews have long given up that notion, but it survives among Christian bibliolaters, and among some Jewish tribes singular recurrences of the belief are not infrequent, which

show the nature of the superstition. Thus in that valuable London paper, "The Jewish World" (September 15, 1876), it is related that Ahmed Eyub Pasha, commanding an expedition against the revolted Beni Haschid tribes, was confronted by a Jewish teacher named Suleiman Ishaki, who claimed to be the Messiah, and aimed to establish a kingdom of Jews in South Arabia with himself as Prince. The Turkish governor has thrown this Messiah and his followers into prison at Mariba, where Ishaki now remains.

This idea of claiming Messiaship seems to have been thrust upon Christ by his friends. After his baptism he went about repeating the words of John, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," without any intimation that he had a special part to play in that kingdom. But John the Baptist sees him and cries, "Behold the man;" disciple after disciple cries, "Thou art the Christ;" voices in the crowd take it up and proclaim him "Son of God," "Son of David;" until he himself seems to have been mystified, and one day asked his personal friends who they and others thought he really was. And when the affirmation came that he was the Messiah, Son of the living God, he begged they would not mention that to anybody. In the synoptical gospels Christ never calls himself "Son of God," and it is probable that in the

old phrase "Son of Man" he found the more rational and liberal side of the messianic idea which he temporarily adopted. In one case he uses it nearly as we should now use the word Humanity: "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." That is, Man is master of the Sabbath.

The repeated desire expressed by Christ that his personal followers should not proclaim him to be the Messiah, but even keep secret their faith, is curious. Plainly he had no personal ambition in the matter. If he really believed himself the Messiah for whose advent his nation looked his injunction would be something as if a politician, trying to be elected President or Premier, should conceal the fact that he was a candidate. It is not impossible that in the early days of his agitation he canvassed among his friends in private the possibilities of a political movement, and, as a poetic radical sometimes does now, dreamed of a reformed world in which the poor working men around him should be enthroned, with their oppressors at their feet. But it is more certain that the messianic idea was gradually translated into the larger spirit of his mind, and merged in his final conception of a regenerate Humanity. Utterly inconsistent with any existing theory of the Messiah was his announcement of a kingdom that was to come without its being

observed, a kingdom within, or, if we accept another sense, "in the midst of" his disciples. No Jew would have recognised as messianic a kingdom not of this world—even in Christ's sense of its being moral and spiritual. Nothing could then have been more anti-messianic to a Jew than that in response to his cry for a national leader one should start forward with a proclamation of an invisible kingdom, made up of meek and lowly non-resistants! The Bishop of Manchester declares that Jesus was the great secularist of his time, and that by his phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" (or "of God") he by no means meant any region beyond the grave, but a new moral order in the earth, and in the present. For once I can agree with a Bishop. He pointed his comrades to the harvest white before them, warned them against thinking too much of the morrow, and was impatient of all talk of a Messiah to come, and a kingdom shaped after the patriarchal fashion. John the Baptist was Elias enough, and the Messiah was already with them, if they were so far liberated from tradition as to see him in a poor outcast minister of truth, and were not like the rest looking for a mighty Captain and Prince, in purple and gold, with mailed hand uplifted against Cæsar.

We must especially guard ourselves from adopting too readily the terms of a report made in the interest

of a theory, and so likely to turn any spontaneous utterance of a fervent and private moment into an official document. Thus when Peter says (Matt. xvi, 16) "Thou art the Christ," it is probable Christ thought of his lowliness rather than of his grandeur as he exclaimed "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven." The priestly perversion which represents Christ as then and there founding a Church, with Peter for its pope, may will admonish us how cold the warm words of that great heart had become in the days of ecclesiastical strife amid which the traditions concerning Christ were "revised in the interest of the orthodox faith," as the prelates naïvely confess. It is more probable that Jesus was simply touched by the fact of a poor working-man turning from all the proud ambitious notions of his race to recognise the Son of God in a man who had not where to lay his head, simply for the truth that was in him. Nor were there wanting some who, long after, confronted the pomp and power of the world with the superior greatness of a rejected and crucified teacher who bore the secret of God in his breast. They cried "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God!" That man had seen through all the tinsel that decorated the seeming favourites of heaven, he had overcome the world,

who could fix, not on Cæsar in his purple but on Jesus in his poverty, as the real king of men and beloved of God. The centuries, rolling on, have reversed all this. We may now ask, "Who is he that yields to the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" That man swims with the current. Were Jesus in Christendom, and heard one name him the Messiah, he could no longer say the compliment came not of flesh and blood; but to any one amid the crowd who should say "Thou art a man,—a right and true man, than whom none can be higher," his hand Christ must surely clasp, and say, "Blessed art thou, my brother! Flesh and blood did not tell you that, neither conventional opinion, nor priest, nor your own interest; but the spirit of truth, and patient thought. Blessed art thou!"

IX.

Christ's pacific teachings, the unobservable interior kingdom he announced, his rebuke of those who look here and there, prove that he had advanced not only beyond the creed and ritual of the synagogue, but beyond the conceit and political narrowness of his nation. Dr. Furness, who has studied the life of Jesus as thoroughly and sympathetically as any living man, has suggested that the spirit of submission was taught by Christ with some reference to the con-

dition of his country. "Accounting themselves the chosen of Heaven and all other nations but as dogs in comparison, they were stung to the quick by the humiliating consciousness of national subjection. They thirsted for vengeance upon their Gentile masters, and indulged in the wildest dreams of temporal prosperity. It was the proud fierce temper of the nation, causing it to chafe against the Roman authority, that was sure to bring on a collision with that mighty power by which it would be ground to powder. This Jesus plainly foresaw. To his prophetic vision the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem was to become a ruin, not one stone left upon another. The only salvation of the people, collectively and personally, was in a temper directly the reverse, in a spirit of patience which no suffering nor injuries could exhaust, and in a humanity that acknowledged an example to be followed in the despised Samaritan."*

And it is just here that the testimony of Paul becomes valuable. Paul knows nothing of Christ as a thaumaturgist; he transmits to us the moral portrait of a man characterized by "gentleness" and "simplicity," and one who believed that it is

* Jesus. By W. H. Furness. Philadelphia: Lippincott. 1871. To this and other works of my dear friend and honoured teacher, as well as to his conversation, my debt has grown with time and is larger than I can compute.

more blessed to give than to receive. But it is a still more important thing that Paul, who, above all other witnesses, bore impress of Christ fresh upon him, should have instantly consecrated himself to the work of uniting Jew and Gentile. The very keynote of Christ's Gospel was to Paul that which he declared to the nations:—Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, slain their enmity, made their peace, and spiritually united the sundered races into "a new man," having access by one spirit to the one Father. This is the Gospel which Paul declares he received from Christ, and I cannot doubt that it represents the last teachings of Jesus in Jerusalem.

But that, again, was by no means the voice of a Jewish Messiah. Such indifferentism as between Jew and Gentile might naturally have evoked from Roman Pilate the words "I find no fault in the man," but to the priesthood it meant utter ruin. It was the reversal of the whole Jewish history. It was as if, in Elijah's time, a Jew had started up to affirm that Baal was equal to Jehovah, and both destined to be superseded by a higher deity. It meant that presently a Paul should be preaching on Mars Hill with texts taken from Greek altars and poets. The Jewish priesthood was nothing if not supreme over all others, and their fundamental claim was that the gods of the nations were idols.

Thus, then, the chief burden of Paul's ministry was the downfall of that tree at whose root John the Baptist had laid the axe; and between John and Paul stands Christ, whose life, genius, and martyrdom had made that consummation possible, and who from the messianic stem of Israel had flowered into a prophet of Humanity.

X.

To two great ideas, both fatal to a priesthood, Christ fell a martyr. He was not put to death because of his beautiful moral teachings or his pure life. There was nothing novel in his moral teachings: his precepts can all be found in Talmudic and other scriptures existing before his time, albeit stated by him far more felicitously and simplified for the popular comprehension, and his high morality was no more original than the sunshine. His fatal peculiarities were, first, that he taught a natural religion, a religion written in flowers on the earth, one with the stars in their courses. He taught men to judge of themselves what was right. Such ideas rendered a priesthood totally unnecessary. Every priesthood rests upon the assumption that they are the essential solicitors and barristers of truth and holiness, and no man can approach Heaven without them. This teacher of a Father whom men could

approach and love, and be loved by, simply through virtue and faith, without any priestly mediator, or any rite or ceremonial, was assailing the very foundation of every temple. Do not go to churches to pray, but to your closet! Put no trust in tithes! Consider the lilies; observe that sower with his seed, or the little mustard seed from which that great tree sprang; think of God as a father waiting and watching for the return of his poor foolish son from a land of famine! It was not indeed for the first time simple natural thoughts had come to freshen the heart of the world, but wherever they have come the successful teacher of them has made necessary the death, gradual or violent, of the priesthood or of himself.

But if this had been his only offence Jesus might perhaps have escaped death, for his eloquence and sincerity had won him a popularity which no priest possessed. But he turned the people against him when he added to it that other fatal idea,—namely, that all their hopes of a national political Messiah and military deliverer were vain, that their proud temple was to be overthrown, and their future glory to be found in fraternising with other nations and not in conquering them. That was more than they could stand. The very masses that could shout Hosanna to a son of David, preparing to overthrow Pilate and priesthood together, were found crying "Crucify him,"

when he stood as a friend of Samaritans, a welcomer of Greeks who called on him, and a man who had plainly found favour with the Roman governor. The mob was lashed to frenzy when they saw Pilate trying to protect him.

But why should Pilate, as is recorded, have steadily set himself to save Jesus? Partly no doubt because he was impressed by the grandeur of the man; but also, it is probable, he felt that no popular man could just then serve the secular authority better than one engaged in destroying those expectations of a coming national deliverer—of a kind which sometimes fulfil themselves—by substituting for them enthusiasm for a moral and religious reformation. Nothing could have satisfied Pilate more than that the Jews should have generally agreed to such a King of the Jews as he over whose dying head he wrote that title. We may indeed compare with Pilate's inscription Christ's own outburst of wonder when a poor fisherman named him the Anointed of God. "Flesh and blood" could never have attested that there lay any divine mark about that homeless helpless man. There was something transcendental in all this, and, as we have seen, it flamed on through the years of early enthusiasm.

XI.

Some years ago I sat with an assembly in the open theatre at Oberammergau to witness the Passion

Play. The stage was tastefully adorned. On the curtain was a picture of Jerusalem, with the mountains rising around it as they rose around us. All about us were symbols of the most ancient German religion sweetly blending with those of early Christianity. On the stage architrave was the Madonna holding the goddess Bertha's rose, whose crimson symbolised a new Heart come to watch over the humble household; and the pelican feeding her young with her blood: emblems now of man's long search to find attestations in nature of an unnatural faith, ending still in fables! The old sacred trees of mythology were there, the beech and birch and pine, and the birds sang gaily in their green branches.

The ancient symbols of faith had grown as naturally as the trees, the heart could carol amid them like the birds, while the blue of heaven and the blessed sunshine poured their warm and tender light upon them all.

But what was the figure we were presently to see moving amid that glorious frame, and bearing the name of Christ! Never before then had I realised how low had sunk the idea of that beautiful heroic soul, in the conventional conception of Christendom. From first to last this Christ of the Passion Play, made up to look like the images turned out by thousands in Italian factories, was about as wooden as one of those

images were it only automatic. It was a mere perfunctory high priest, a characterless effigy— no touch of humanity about him, no sparkle of feeling, no real wrath, no reality of any kind. Not for a moment could this effect be ascribed to the actor: he acted faithfully the conception of Christ which had been drilled into him by the priests who manage the affair. The Bavarians all regarded it as perfect, for not one of them had ever dreamed of associating true and simple human emotion or action with Jesus. They were looking on a god, accepting every unreality as a token of how divine he was,—so admirably unhuman! But I will say, even for those poor peasants, that at no time did they evince such horror at the careful crucifixion of Christ as they did when the thieves' legs were broken. Humanly speaking, Christ did not suffer so much as the thieves. And as to the god,—how could a few hours of physical pain be anything to one engaged in the glorious work of saving a world on his way to share the throne of the universe?

There were numbers of English people there, most of them clergymen. I took some pains to learn their opinion concerning the play and its chief character, and their enthusiasm was boundless. Coming home I found that books, articles, letters, had been written, all full of glowing eulogies of the Ammergau Christ,

and some speculator was proposing in the *Times* to get up the same thing in London. I have tried to find some one who was shocked, to discover some criticism which should intimate that this passionless simulacrum, who could neither laugh nor cry nor strike back, was not the European ideal of a man. In sooth, he was as much like a man as the Phantasm which demanded his sacrifice was like a god. It was the apotheosis of abjectness.

Precisely opposite in every respect to the perfunctory conventional Christ,—with his unreal difficulties, which he knows he will conquer, and his affectation of the sorrows and feelings of men who must fight their troubles with no angel or reserved omnipotence to help,—is the man whom the gospels portray on any mind not taught to portray him beforehand on the gospels. A man of quick sensibilities, who can flash anger on his best friends when they would drive off the children, and in another moment be all sunshine as the little ones nestle to his heart. A man who can fulminate lightnings of invective against hypocritical deceivers of the people, when his heart is ready to break with agony for his beloved Jerusalem. Impulsive, sympathetic, and sometimes wonderfully prudent, with the eloquence that speaks from a deep conviction—with authority of conviction, not that of the scribes—so that even rude policemen sent to arrest him return

empty-handed, and say only "never man spake like this man;" a man who knows the power of silence, and then as a sheep before his shearers is dumb!

The conventional European Christ—the Christ of Ammergau—marches on to his cross by a prescribed foreknown path, fulfilling hard and fast theological conditions. The real Christ escapes whenever he can, slips out of the hand of his pursuers, and when death overtakes him at last views it with anguish and dismay. Other martyrs have sung at the stake; he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

That cry could never have been wrung from the lips of a man who saw in his own death a pre-arranged plan for the world's salvation, and his own return to divine glory, temporarily renounced for transient misery on earth. The fictitious theology of a thousand years shrivels beneath the awful anguish of that cry. He forsaken by God! Why he *was* God, says Theology, and this was the supreme act of his divinity! That Christ might have known if he had been trained in the smallest of our theological schools. But he had not that advantage. To him untimely Death brought pain and unmitigated disappointment. It seemed the end of all the good he could do for humanity. He at least was not acting in a Passion Play. Again and again had Christ tried to escape this danger, even with dexterity, and on his trial he fenced with every

art of speech and silence. When he saw the coils of priestly hatred closing around him, his soul was exceeding sorrowful. Death haunted him. When a woman anointed him tenderly, the odour reminded him of death. "She embalms me for burial," he cries, and his very words shudder. He meets his disciples at supper; but when he sees and tastes the red wine, that too suggests death: he recoils, and cries "It's my blood! Drink it yourselves—I'll never taste it again!"

It took many centuries for such ejaculations of a man facing premature and violent death to harden into the formal speeches of New Testament tradition, and longer still to fossilise into sacraments and dogmas. Under these formal dogmatic sophistications the masses of Christendom have been so long moulded that it is hardly to be conceived that they can ever recover the genuine Christ, or come into contact with his spontaneous life, his heart, his genius. And fortunately, it is not a matter of eternal life and death that they should. Yet we may hope that so soon as the people have been educated out of the degrading superstition that a man's eternal well-being or wretchedness depend on a particular opinion about a person who lived in an obscure age and region, they will at least be free of that paralysing ear which has turned Christ to a graven image. And

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though it be not a matter of life and death, still it is a grateful and a noble task to rescue the memory of a great man from the perversions and superstitions with which he has been invested, and preserve to our human nature every token and example of its power to rise above the animalism which degrades and the evil which afflicts it, and ascend to the heights of excellence and beatitude.

CHRISTIANITY.

ITS DAWN.

I.

CHRISTIANITY is about fifteen hundred years old. That is about the age of the completed Nicene Creed which first combined into a distinct doctrinal system its previously incoherent elements. As an ecclesiastical and temporal power it is somewhat older, dating from the conversion (A.D. 312) of Constantine, who held his new beliefs mixed up with paganism, as did most of the Latin Christians. The name Christianity is first found used by the opponents of the Christians—such as Pliny the Younger, early in the second century,—but used as name for a crime not for a system of doctrine; as meaning that it is much later. Although the word Christianity is not found in the New Testament, the word "Christian," which by no means implies as yet the existence of a system, occurs in the New Testament (Acts xi, 26; xxvi, 28; 1 Peter iv, 16) three times; it is in the later books,

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and is used in a sense indicating that it was a term of reproach or contempt directed against the believers in Christ. It is a slang word, mixed of Greek and Latin. The efforts which have been made to prove by the sentence (Acts xi), "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch," that they adopted that title in the first century, while Paul was preaching there, is disproved by the fact that Paul warned his friends against calling themselves after the name of Christ (1 Cor. i, 12). Paul's failure to recognise the title when Agrippa uses it was very marked. Tacitus says:— "So for the quieting of this rumour" (of his having set fire to Rome) "Nero judicially charged with the crime, and punished with most studied severities, that class hated for their general wickedness, whom the vulgar (vulgus) call Christians. The originator of that name was one Christ, who in the reign of Tiberias suffered death by sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. The detestable superstition (exitiabilis superstitio) thereby repressed for the time, again broke out, not only over Judea, the native soil of the mischief, but in the city also, where from every side all atrocious and abominable things collect and flourish."

Looking beyond the form of Christianity to its elements, we might follow Bishop Sherlock as he followed Augustine, and say that Christianity is as old as the Creation, but for the very unphilosophical character of the phrase. One religion differs from another mainly by the outward expression and body it gives to the moral and religious sentiment. To say that Christianity is as old as the Creation is as misleading as to say that Steam-power is as old as the Creation, which in a sense is equally true. Christianity represents a special embodiment and definite application of that religious sentiment which has always existed, which has been variously organised in the other religions of the world; and its history is known. Like other religions it may be viewed in three chief aspects: 1, as a moral system; 2, as a philosophy; 3, as a mythology.

Our present task is to trace these several elements from their proximate sources to their confluence and combination as Christianity.

II.

As a moral system Christianity is mainly Jewish. In saying this I do not refer to the fundamental laws against murder, theft, and the like, which are common to all historic religions; nor to such maxims as the Golden Rule, which was not only always a current Levitical rule in Judea, but has been of immemorial use among all great races. But the ethics of Christianity are distinctive only as those of other systems are, that is, in those respects in which their moral

laws are not based upon the universal conscience. Such unique moral laws are in any country generally found bearing in the direction of man's supposed duty to God, or of those actions whose performance is meant to bring man into favour with God. In this respect Christianity mainly repeats the laws and rules of the Essenes, a sect which had divided from the Pharisees some two centuries before the birth of Christ. We have ample information concerning this sect from Philo and Josephus. They lived in communities, and did not marry,—depending, not without reason as Pliny declares, upon conversions and initiations from the outside world for their continuance and growth. They professed to find a mystical, or allegorical sense in the Hebrew Scriptures, even to the smallest jot and tittle. A convert after undergoing a year's probation was baptized. After a further probation he was received into full membership. If a member committed a fault he was privately reproved by the elders; if he did not repent he was reproved before the community; and if he then did not reform he was excommunicated. They placed before every member the following eight degrees which might be, successively and with increasing difficulty, attained. 1. Outward or bodily purity by baptism; a symbol of which, given to each, was an apron, such as was used to dry one's self with after baptism. 2. The

stage at which the vow of celibacy was taken. 3. Inward or spiritual purity. 4. The banishment of all anger and malice, and the cultivation of a meek and lowly spirit. 5. Holiness. 6. Fitness to become a temple of the Holy Spirit and to prophesy. 7. The devotee advanced to that state when he could perform miraculous cures, and raise the dead. 8. And finally, he who had reached such a rare degree of sanctity and power as the seventh, would fulfil the office of Elias, as forerunner of the Messiah. These people lived as hermits in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, along the shores of the Dead Sea, and in the neighbourhood of Alexandria. They would never pray in synagogues, and sent their offerings privately. They were non-resistants, refused to take oaths, and forbade Essenes to go to law. They were especially antagonistic to the Pharisees, because these believed in the outward law without acknowledging any mysterious sense in it.

The New Testament opens with the appearance of a great prophet, John the Baptist, whose dress and speech are those of an Essene, and who denounces other sects without including that. Probably his movement indicated some variations from the early Essenism; but, however that may be, Jesus became one of John's converts, and was baptized by him. For a time he preached the Essene doctrines, and practised them. He did not marry, and recognised the exalted condition

of those who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake (Matt. xix, 12). He taught non-resistance, selling all one's possessions for the sake of the poor, and baptism. Presently we find him gradually taking on the appearance of a type, rather than of a real person,—a sort of Essene allegory, going through the eight stages: baptism, the anti-marriage state, inward purification, manifestations of the meek and lowly state of mind, reception of the holy spirit in his body as a temple (transfiguration), and prophesy, curing diseases and raising the dead, and finally—the eighth state, that of Elias, being awarded to John—becoming the Messiah.

This development and process is too normal and regular not to excite our suspicion. I have already noted (c. 1) some of the indirect and unintentional testimony in the New Testament showing that Jesus by no means adhered rigidly to the Essene sect. It is especially remarked that he never baptised any one, and his direction to his disciples to baptise becomes very doubtful when we further find Paul thanking God that he had baptised none. Moreover there is a tradition of his having attended a wedding, of his eating with publicans and sinners, and his disregarding the Sabbath, all of which are inconsistent with his really having remained with the sect even so far as it may have been represented by John the Baptist. But we

shall often have to observe how little the individual mind and character of Christ had to do with shaping Christianity. The Essene moral machinery caught him up and made him over into its model saint, to so large an extent that we shall never perhaps know how far during life he really followed that sect. When the system of Christianity was finally formed we find its moral elements, beyond those common to all religions, to be Essene,—namely, baptism, celibacy, communism among the most holy and sacramental communion as a relic of it among the less holy, religious orders with initiations, secret signs resembling those of the Essene hermits of Syria and Egypt. There is much abjectness calling itself lowly, and mendicancy aping self-denial. There are elders with powers of private rebuke and public excommunication. The becoming of temples for the Holy Ghost reappears as ecstasy, and there are saints claiming power to work miracles. All this represented a scheme of sanctity which from many more primitive sources had cohered in the Essene sect, and, through the prestige of Christ, passed to be the inheritance of Christianity.

III.

The Christian Philosophy is much less simple as to its sources. It resulted from a most singular interchange and interaction at great intervals between the

Semitic and the Hellenic minds. At some very early period the Greeks had derived from the Hebrews the worst feature of their religion,—that of Human Sacrifices. This was an idea alien to the Aryan race from which they sprang. It was a famous point made by Buddha against the Brahmins, that if they thought the gods were fond of precious offerings they ought logically to offer their own children. The first cases of human sacrifices among the Greeks were sufficiently isolated to be made the themes of great poems. The salient instance of Iphigenia, who was vowed to a deity, but not sacrificed,—a kid having been miraculously substituted for her,—bears in it traces of having been mixed from the story of Abraham and Isaac, for whom a ram was substituted, and that of Jephthah's daughter, whose name is probably travestied in Iphigenia. The Greeks, having borrowed this notion, elaborated it into a sort of theosophic conception that the stern deities could only be appeased by sacrifice of the most pure, unblemished, virginal beings, and it remained a theory and sentiment among them long after it had ceased to be a practical part of the Hebrew religion.

Meanwhile the Hebrews had come under Greek influence, and for some centuries before Christ had gradually been personifying the Wisdom of God. In the poetry of the Old Testament much is said of

the "Word" of Jehovah. We find it recurring in the Psalms,—"By the Word of Jehovah were the heavens made;" "he sent his Word and healed them;" "his Word runneth very swiftly." Then we find, as I have said, "Wisdom" more clearly personified, especially in the writings ascribed to Solomon,—"Doth not Wisdom cry?" "Where shall Wisdom be found?" Wisdom speaks, saying—"Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way. Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting. Then was I by him as one brought up with him. And I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." When we come to the region of time covered by the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the Talmud we find the course of personification has so far advanced that Jehovah is no longer alone,—that the "Word" and "Wisdom" have blended to form a being capable of being further identified with the "Logos" of Plato, which had undergone a similar process at the hands of the Platonic School of Alexandria. It so happened that the head of that school, at the time of Christ's appearance, was a learned Jew named Philo. His great aim was to recommend Jewish ideas to his Hellenic philosophers and friends, and, chiefly through him, the identity of the personified "Wisdom" and the "Logos" was already established. But it was still an invisible ideal until that great work—the Fourth

Gospel—appeared. Who wrote that book no man knows. All that we know was that it was written by an Alexandrine philosopher about the latter part of the second century, and that it had a distinctly theoretical purpose. It was the keystone which completed the arch formed by the Hebrew "Wisdom" on one side, and the Hellenic "Logos" on the other.

Next we have to consider Paul, who had imported other ideas into the swelling mass of theory. Brought up a Pharisee, and still preserving so much of his original belief that when accused he did not hesitate to cry "I am a Pharisee," Paul aimed to have his idea of Christ fulfil that sacrificial notion which he found as deeply rooted among the Gentiles as among his own countrymen. The deity was to be soothed by immolation of the purest and best; but as the world was now refined beyond the coarse and literal sacrifice of Macarias and Iphegenias, Christ was represented by him as such an exceedingly pure and perfect being that he would answer as a substitute for all other sacrifices, and for the human race in all ages. This idea, coarse as it now appears, denoted in its day a distinct ascent of the human mind above one more repulsive, and also horrible.

When Paul—whose voice and theme inspired from afar the eloquent but unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—established this point, he had not the

slightest anticipation of the new philosophy which was to arise and embody itself in the gospel said to be written after traditions received from John. But Paul did other important work towards forming Christianity, principally by breaking down Jewish exclusiveness, the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile—and preparing the way for the new faith to become a general religion instead of merely another Jewish sect. When Christianity came to be formulated by the two great Nicene Councils (A.D. 325 and 381) these elements were already prepared. The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Ghost has an archæological history too long to be traced here; nor is that necessary, for, so far as its appearance in Christianity is concerned, we need look for its origin no farther than the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of Paul.

The doctrine of a personal Spirit of Evil, originating in Ancient Persia, had invested some centuries before the birth of Christ an old Assyrian angel of Accusation,—Satan,—and he had become degraded from a retributive agent of God into a fiend. There was no philosophy of evil at the time to secure even the mind of Christ against this idea. And, indeed, however repulsive it may be to us now, at that period it was apparently essential to the growth of a pure and perfect ideal of God, as infinite Love, with whom the origination of pain and evil could not be associated.

The world, as well as Christ, was recoiling from the worship of demons under the name of deities, and the new ideal was secured by attributing all phenomena of evil to imps, furies, dragons,—all of which were ultimately generalised by Christianity into Satan, whose works it was the mission of Christ to destroy.

IV.

We come now to consider the Christian Mythology. Under this title I include all those supernatural narratives in the New Testament upon which Christianity rested its authority over, and against, human conscience and reason. I know well that there are some able men who do not regard these miracles as purely mythical or fictitious. They say, and it is perfectly true, that there are many instances in history, especially in periods of religious excitement, when men and women afflicted with disease have experienced remarkable physiological effects, and even temporary cures, from the word or touch of an individual in whose magical powers they had faith. I should be perfectly ready to concede that some of the apparently marvellous actions ascribed to Christ might be found by analysis not subversive of natural laws. But before having to explain them or account for them on rational or scientific principles, it is first of all necessary to inquire whether there be any testi-

mony of importance showing that anything of the kind was believed to have occurred by those who must have witnessed or heard of them if they did occur.

Now, in the case of the alleged miracles performed by Christ, we have the very strongest evidence that he never did work them, nor anything like them, that he never professed to work them, that he regarded the whole principle of miracle-working with contempt.

In the first place we have his own words, when asked for a sign. He replies, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there will no sign be given to it." It is true that to this is added, "but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and nights in the whale's belly, so will the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth." But we have reason to believe that this reference to Jonah was not made by Christ, inasmuch as it rests only on the authority of judaising Matthew, and, as we have seen, anticipates the legend of his resurrection after three days' burial, which could only have arisen after his death. But, it may be asked, by what right do you take one part of the utterance as genuine and reject the other? I answer, simply because the writer of a gospel full of signs and wonders would never have invented so sharp a rebuke of signs and wonders; but when he had to report such an utterance

he might naturally have tried to soften it by interpolating an exception in favour of the resurrection,—the main sign around which the believers were gathering,—and its supposed prefiguration in the story of Jonah. Again, in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ represents Abraham as saying, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Startled they might be, but not really persuaded of the truth as he wished men to be persuaded who said, "Why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right;" who pointed men to the light and cloud of morning and evening and bade them discern the signs of their time as they did the weather in the sky; who chose his texts and parables from nature—the lily, the mustard-seed, the falling sparrow.

The high improbability that a mind such as this should have also claimed to work the very signs against which he protested, is corroborated by the absence of any reference to such performances in the writings of his contemporaries. Here was Philo, who was twenty years of age when Christ was born and who lived long after his death. If any man had appeared at Jerusalem professing to be a Messiah and working wonders, there is no man whom the news would reach more certainly then Philo; yet we do not find the least allusion to such things in any of that writer's

various works. Again there was Josephus, who wrote a minute account of the Jews and their history, including the affairs of that very period. He appeared in the first generation after Christ's death. And yet we do not find in his work that any rumours even existed of a man working miracles or wonders. Next we have Clement, who, we know, wrote in the same century in which Christ died, mentioned by Paul as his fellow-labourer. Clement wrote an Epistle, known to be a genuine production of the first century, in which no allusion is made to any miracle wrought by Christ or his Apostles. The same is true of Ignatius, about whom there was a tradition that he was one of those children that Jesus took in his arms: he died about a hundred years after Christ's birth, but left no mention of the miracles. Both Pliny and Tacitus mention Christ and the Christians, but neither hint that any miracles were spoken of in their time, that is, at the close of the first and beginning of the second century. And finally, there are the voluminous writings of Paul, writings by a man whose birth in Jerusalem was very near the period of Christ's death,—if, indeed, it did not precede that event, since in his Epistle to Philemon (about A.D. 60) he speaks of himself as "Paul the aged." Paul does not allude to any miracle wrought by Christ, nor to any rumour that miracles were associated with his

ministry, nor even mention the names of those afterwards connected with such events. Such stories are related only in anonymous writings called gospels, not professing (unless in one case where we know the profession untrue) to be records by eye-witnesses, traditions collected late in the second century, and by no means to be set against the works whose authorship and early origin are undisputed. Are we to believe that a man appeared in the greatest city of the East, wrought miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, and that all this was unknown to the chief historians and authors of his own era,—his enemies not ridiculing such stories, his own devoted Apostles never even faintly alluding to them? That is plainly incredible.

But how, then, shall we account for the Christian Mythology as we find it in the canon of the New Testament ratified by the Council of Carthage, A.D. 397? Why, the stories represent only the familiar fables and folklore of the people swarming in Greece and Rome from every part of the World. Among all the miracles of the New Testament not one is original. Bacchus had changed wine into water. Ancient heroes and sages were generally said to have sprung of the unions between the gods and daughters of men. In Arabian Mythology Abraham's birth was announced by a star. By a star Eneas and his companions were guided from the shores of Troy to the West. The

sacred dove had betokened to Noah the emergence of the world from its baptism before it descended on Christ at his baptism, and in many lands it had been the emblem of renewal, its note being the first voice of spring. Moses and Elias also fasted forty days. Buddha and Zoroaster were also tempted by Evil Powers, and pursued by kings like Herod. Five or six centuries before Christ Pythagoras was said to have miraculously named the number of an enormous draught of fishes,—a legend the more remarkable because the Egyptian Essenes closely resemble the Pythagorean communities, and inherited many of their legends. Pythagoras had power to still waves and tempests at sea. Elijah made the widow's meal and oil increase; Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty loaves; the Hindoo Saint Mugdala, giving from his little store of food to Holy Duriasa finds that store inexhaustible; many such myths preceded that of the loaves and fishes. As for opening blind eyes, healing diseases, walking on water, casting out demons, raising the dead, resurrection, ascension, all these have been the common mythologic currency of every race, from the beginning of time to the present, when stories of a similar kind are firmly credited by those who put their faith in so-called Spirit-mediums.

It is highly important to understand the sources of Christian Mythology, in order not to fall into the error

of supposing that the miraculous legends were invented by the early Christians, as an intentional imposture. Such is by no means the fact. The popular superstitions of the people about their gods, prophets, heroes, genii, had invested hundreds of forgotten beings before they were told of Pythagoras, Bacchus or Elias, and by the same process they invested Christ and his mother, and passed on to be told of the Apostles, and then of Saints—like the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who turned water into oil to feed the lamps; and holy Paul, to whose cave St. Anthony came, when the raven, which had been bringing the hermit a daily half loaf for sixty years, now brought a whole one; and St. Stephen, whose dead body restored five other bodies to life,—oddly enough without resuscitating itself. The mantle of myth falls from prophet to prophet, from saint to saint, and it represents the love and homage of the ignorant for the great whose influence they feel but cannot comprehend.

It is not easy to acquit the authorities of the early Church as we can the common people of dishonesty. They encouraged what they knew were superstitions, and added to them. However, it is fortunately of no importance to us to draw the line between their credulity and their dishonesty. It is enough that we know the pedigree of every Christian myth, and that not one of them has any connection

with Christ whatever. Only one, indeed, was heard of in the first Century, the resurrection of Christ. Of that Paul had heard, and his eager belief in it shows how ready he would have been to believe Christ's own miracles if he had heard of them. Of this particular miracle it need only be remarked that Paul's testimony to it is valueless for the supernaturalist, since, after naming those who had seen the risen Christ, he places all their evidence on the same unsatisfactory footing as his own. He tells us that the only appearance of Christ to him was as to "one born out of due season," —which may mean the apparition of some spiritual ecstacy, but at any rate by no means fulfils the conditions even of that low degree of evidence which any man's word or belief could supply for such a fact.

The Mythology had a long time in which to gather around Christ; the stories were already floating about, and the old forms they had once invested were crumbling or discredited. They had at least from 100 to 200 years to make their way into the traditions about Christ as we find them in the New Testament; and in an uncritical, unscientific age that is more than five centuries of England.

But this I would observe: the philosophy, the ascetic rules, the mythology, which we have been tracing, could not gather around Christ while he was a living man, nor around his name so long as it was

associated with a personal influence. As in some countries villages gather around extinct volcanoes and plant their vintages in the lava which once streamed down their slopes as fire, so it was long after the first enthusiasm kindled by Jesus and John had cooled, and they had become chiefly names to conjure with, that the priesthood, whose line has never been broken, fenced in the hardened lava of their hearts, and turned its subtle quality and lingering virtues to their own ends. Personally, Christ's heaviest blow was at the very principle of a priesthood. When Christianity was formed it meant Christ's whole prestige and popularity impressed to rebuild that very power which he assailed and which crucified him.

CHRISTIANITY.

ITS DAY.

I.

For a thousand years Christianity reigned over Europe with undisputed sway. That may be called its Day. What power the Christian Hierarchy held may be partly estimated by comparison with the supremacy of our Courts of Law. The Holy Trinity in Heaven was the symbol and authority of a mighty engine of ecclesiastical power on earth, which brought its force and its sanctions to bear on every nation, throne, home, and on every man, woman, and child. The statutes of this religious Empire consisted of the Bible as codified in creeds, arbitrarily interpreted by Pope and prelates, and applied by a priesthood armed with the strength of kings and nobles, armies and navies. That which Tacitus sneered at as a "detestable superstition," had gained such ascendancy that the world saw the last of the Cæsars holding the stirrup by which a Christian Pontiff mounted his horse—an incident

which signalled the conquest of what is now called Christendom.

It is sometimes claimed by theologians that this spreading of Christianity far and wide is in itself a proof of its divine origin, and of the providence that attended it. But on this it must be remarked that its spread has been surpassed by several rival religions. Mahommedanism,—wielding the same powers that Christianity wielded, the sword and authority of princes,—has, in a far shorter time, gained numbers as great of people much more united and earnest in their faith. Buddhism, without aid of the sword, in far less time had almost doubled Christianity in numbers. Only a hundred years ago the Wesleyan movement was a despised revival going on in the streets of English cities and towns; now it is not only a very large sect in England, but the largest in the United States. Any one who has observed the contemporary agitation called "Spiritualism," may see how such movements are spread. Spiritualism in a few years has run up to millions, where in the same length of time the Christian revival had not won a thousand adherents; and the propagandists of Spiritualism, having to run the gauntlet of a shrewd sceptical age, without the power of life and death over gainsayers, have exceeded the numerical triumphs of Christianity during a corresponding length of time after it possessed that power. So, the

theory that the spread of Christianity is evidence of its divine origin, proves too much one way, for it would show a greater providential favour attending other religions; and it proves too little in another way, for it leaves us to ask why Providence has not enabled it to swallow up its rivals.

It has also been said that the trials and martyrdom of the early followers of the crucified teacher, and those who subsequently believed in him, are proof of the truth of that in which they believed. We are asked whether it is possible men would undergo such sufferings for a falsehood. To this my reply is, that most of those martyrdoms took place before there was any system rightly called Christianity in the world. In those primitive days, before Christianity ascended the throne of Europe, the believers were humble people who were confronting proud established religions, such as Christianity itself afterwards became. They did then have truth with them—at least far higher truth than was embodied in the pagan systems against which they were rebelling. That truth sustained them, filled them with enthusiasm. It does not, however, prove that there was not with their truth much admixture of error. When Christianity afterwards spread through Germany and Britain, it had to propagate itself with fire and sword; and many thousands in these Northern nations were found as ready as the early believers in Christ to

undergo martyrdom for the sake of their gods and goddesses—a fact which raised an inscrutable problem before the early Christian zealots themselves. Our ancestors had to confront the alternatives, "Be baptised or burnt;" and though many were baptised many others were burnt, or slain by such refinements of torture as having vipers thrust down their throats. But all that does not prove that the pagan martyrs died for the truth. Nor does Christian martyrdom prove that the beliefs of the sufferers were true.

Christianity never numbered a fourth as many martyrs as were sacrificed by itself when it came into power. These martyrs were not only pagans but heretics from its own ranks. Indeed, its constitution from a society of voluntary adherents into a great compulsory authority, denotes the fact that it gained and preserved its long day of rule only against the protest of many honest minds, which it was necessary to crush.

II.

Nevertheless, Christianity did prevail, and it is now open to us to analyse the sources from which its power was fed.

1. Popular Ignorance. There was no printing-press, no school: the masses could not read. The few books in existence were monopolised by the priests. For untold ages the training of the people had been in

gross superstition, an endless instruction to make themselves as blind as possible, and to follow priestly guides implicitly, under temporal and eternal penalties. Even here, in this comparatively enlightened country, how few are they who personally study the laws under which they live! How naturally we trust all that to judges and lawyers! How few, again, study the laws of health, or investigate their own frames! The great mass trust themselves entirely to the doctors. In those early days the people surrendered themselves even more unquestioningly to the priestly barristers of heaven and physicians of the soul. When Christ appealed to the people in Jerusalem, he was met with the cry—"Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him? But this multitude that knows not the law are accursed." The great crime of Christ was, "He stirreth up the people." Every such effort to induce the masses to think for themselves was sure to be crushed. Since the day when the man, woman and serpent were said to have been all cursed by Jehovah for a joint conspiracy to learn something, every priesthood has hated all real education of the masses; and though in some countries they have had to yield to the popular hunger for knowledge, they still insist that it shall not be had except as adulterated with such drugs of superstition as shall paralyse, so far as possible, their ability to use it.

2. Celibacy. Abstention from marriage, though it originated in mere asceticism, was retained among the priesthood because it was found to be one of the most potent means of preserving the Church as a compact centralised system. One can hardly repress a smile on observing how simple to Père Hyacinthe appears his violation of Catholic law in this particular, and how easy he seems to think it would be for the Church of Rome to relax its rule. The fact is, the Church began by holding the celibacy of its priesthood in a lax way, and its whole progress has gone hand-in-hand with increased strictness in that law. The chief reason why the Western Church so far surpassed the Eastern in power and influence was because the latter did not preserve a celibate priesthood. Lord Bacon said, "He that hath a wife and children hath given hostages to fortune." It is certainly true. The man of family has given hostages to his own state, to his community. He has not his whole stake in a Church. The Pope cannot say to that man who has an interest in one locality, and a home in which his affections are centred, "Go," and he goeth, or "Come," and he cometh. His loyalty is divided. He is brought under social influences that may be far removed from those which surround the distant centre of an ecclesiastical system. The Roman Catholic priest has always been the trustworthy servant of his Church, because

wherever he may be in the world he is moved by nerves that centre in Rome. He has no other interest, no other passion, and no hope of advancement from any other source. Cut off from hopes of social distinction, political promotion, military renown, or family joys, he is thus and thus only in a position to be absolutely occupied with the interests of his Church. Christianity could never have reigned in Europe had it not possessed a priesthood bound to its service in body and soul. For this reason the Church was far more ready to relax the rules of morality than of that which prevented a priest from having a legal wife and family. It was but very slowly that the English people and clergy, even when the Reformation began, could bear the idea of a married priesthood; and they were more willing to recognise illegal than legal relations. The Archbishop of York took an oath that he was not legally married, though he was; and Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, for a long time carried about his wife concealed in a large chest with breathing holes in it. From the day that the English clergy began to marry Romanism declined, not only as a power but as a system of doctrine; for the priesthood was subjected to all those social influences which make the progress of mankind.

3. The Confessional. This institution no doubt originated in the natural influence exerted by wise and

sympathetic individuals over the humble people who came to them for counsel or support. When this pure and simple influence was formulated and invested with the right of command under shelter of secrecy, the Church was able to spring its engine upon the individual with immense power. It was able to utilise the intimate condition, the morbid fears, the sentiment of each man and woman. It could ferret out secrets and turn them to strength. No conspiracy against its authority could escape detection in the confessional. Every sin confessed made the poor penitent a slave. The priest had each offender in his power, whose secret he knew; and, if his authority in the community were assailed, his menaced retainers were all around to sustain the detective, who himself had no family or any corresponding interest at stake.

4. Sanctions. Christianity possessed the right to punish every offence or unbelief to any extent, even with death: by this means it was able to silence all who ventured to criticise its creeds, and to reward largely those who maintained them with special devotion. It was thus able to press into its service all the learning, the genius, and the arts of the time. By killing off all men of ability who would not submit, the Church was able to cover its walls with admirable pictures of the torments awaiting all who did not obey it, and the bliss of all who did. It had skilled orators who could

artfully defame all other beliefs than its own, and scribes able to bring out of the Bible just what the Church desired. The masses were thus fettered not only outwardly but inwardly; each was trained from the cradle to believe that the same hand which Providence had empowered to bind him or her on earth could bind them also beyond the grave to all eternity.

5. The Prestige of Christ. While Christ was on earth the common people heard him gladly. He had taken their side against an oppressive priesthood; he had taken his lot with the poor and the outcast; he had appealed to what was deepest and best in every man; he had treated women with respect and even the sinful with affection. He had taught the divine love to those who had heard only of an angry and jealous Jehovah. He had uttered many beautiful discourses and parables, bringing the highest truths within realisation of the lowly, whereas previously they had been speculations confined to philosophers. He had been transmitted from generation to generation as an ideal type, in whom were embodied the wisdom, gentleness, and peace for which all hearts longed.

Christianity added to this much that was calculated to influence the people powerfully. It made a new Christ. It represented him as a deity who, moved by compassion for the poor who were all under sentence of everlasting tortures, laid aside the splendour of his

celestial abode, descended to the earth; assumed the form of an humble working man, a carpenter; became the very poorest of the poor, having not where to lay his head; suffered the most ignominious death, voluntarily;—all this for the sake of mankind, and in order to save them from eternal anguish. To this end, they alleged, he had founded a Church to represent him, and any disobedience to that Church was base ingratitude to a Saviour who had undergone so much for human advantage.

Fictitious as this representation was in every particular, it was very effective. In the first place it made the masses more contented with their poverty. It was a consecration of pauperism that the best man ever born was the poorest. Various sentences of his also could be quoted levelled against riches. It was very important to the Church that the people should be willing to part easily with the fruit of their toil, and that they should be satisfied with the least part for themselves. For the Church itself must be rich: its treasures belonged to the king of heaven.

Another thing fostered by the pathetic pictures of Christ's poverty and low position, and also by his patient submission under suffering, was a kind of abject and spiritless character among the people. They were thoroughly tamed. They thought of themselves as worms, and any idea of having rights or trying to

obtain them could never arise, so long as the meek, self-sacrificing, unresisting, peasant of Nazareth was pictured on every Church wall and in every sermon as the type of what God demanded every human being should aspire to be.

It will thus be seen that the thousand years of Christian sway implied innumerable populations bound hand and foot, mind and body; that its long day of power was a long night to the mind and heart of Europe. But there were holy stars watching through this long night. Christianity could not entirely quench the pure flame of Christ's heart, and still less could it arrest that steady evolution of humanity and religion which is the unwearied eternal providence.

III.

In judging the tree by its fruits I must affirm my conviction that the fruits of Christianity, though not altogether evil, were preponderantly evil.

The chief root of its evil was that it taught mankind that their supreme duty is to believe certain propositions; and that the very worst sin man or woman can commit is to disbelieve those propositions. The motto of Christianity was: "The Church has a remedy for every sin except heresy." Higher than morality, conduct, or character, was set this unquestioning submission of the mind to creeds. Now,

it may be said that a man's belief determines his conduct and character. But that is not true. Some philologists say that the word *believe* is one form of an old word meaning to *belove*; but, if so, "belief" and "belove" long ago parted company, and, at any rate, the kind of belief which the Church has all along demanded has been an assent apart from performance. If we examine the creeds for which it demanded belief we find that they have little or nothing to do with a man's character. The Apostles' creed has no word about duty. The Athanasian creed opens by saying, "Whoever will be saved, *before all things* it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith," and it goes on to recite the Catholic faith,—namely, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and his coming to judge the quick and the dead. It anathematises those who confound the persons or divide the substance of the Trinity. Out of about 700 words in it one sentence has a vague reference to conduct, in that it says that they who have done good shall go to everlasting life, and they who have done evil to everlasting fire; but the force of even this one sentence is broken by the definition of belief in the mysteries of heaven as necessary for salvation "before all things." The Nicene Creed does not even mention good and evil deeds; it anathematises only those who deny the eternal deity of Christ. But a man cannot live the Trinity. He cannot

reduce the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost to a way of loving his neighbour as himself. I once heard of a venerable lady who said Total Depravity was a very good doctrine if it was only lived up to; but even she, I fancy, would find difficulty in living up to the uncreate co-eternal subsistence of the Three Persons. The Nicene creed declares its objects of worship incomprehensible. The Church declares its doctrines and sacraments mysteries. Belief in them therefore cannot be an intelligent belief: it can only amount to assent, or an admission that a thing is true without any real grounds for believing it true. That kind of assent, without knowledge of the thing assented to, must be either superstition or hypocrisy. The result of this kind of teaching is that the name of Jesus became the label of Jesuitism, and that another name for falsehood; that intellectual veracity was denounced as a crime, and scientific men compelled to renounce on their knees their actual knowledge; and that by such means as these reason was dishonoured, research discouraged, dishonesty fostered, and both the moral and intellectual progress of mankind seriously retarded.

A cognate evil was that Christianity was from the first based on the notion that the great end of man was to give pleasure and benefit to God. Its theory was that God was profoundly concerned to have certain

creeds believed and rites performed, and would be disturbed and enraged if not so satisfied. It was discovered long ago, and became a political maxim, that the object of all government is benefit of the governed; but the Church persisted in holding the good of man subordinate to the pleasure of God. And as the Church identified itself with God it made its system not a means but an end. The result of this error was that man was freely sacrificed, holocausts of men burned and massacred. Christianity carried fire and sword among Jewish and Mussulman races to such an extent that it has become a symbol of violence and discord, under which no religious unity can ever be secured. It has successively alienated Science and Humanity.

Under these tremendous doctrines and mysteries, raised up as the chief thing, such things as pertained to every day life shrank to insignificance. The Methodist still sings,

> O tell me no more
> Of this world's vain show.

IV.

But let us consider, on the other hand, what advantages it secured.

First of all, notwithstanding its horrible doctrine of human depravity, it gave man some conception of the grandeur of his own nature. It taught the people to believe in their own immortality. The humblest mother, as she looked upon the babe in her arms, saw in it a soul whose existence would run parallel to the existence of God. No doubt that great light cast many shadows. There was joined to it those pictures of Heaven and Hell which powerfully stimulated selfishness and fear. It also, to a large extent, projected beyond the grave devotion and enthusiasm of which this world ought not to have been defrauded. But at that time there was need that mankind should attain a profounder sense of the far-reaching issues of human life and the eternal dignity of human nature, and such was one effect of that doctrine.

In the next place it conferred some dignity on labour, and on the toiling class. The Church acknowledged a carpenter for its founder and a fisherman for its first pope. It preached a kingdom to which the humblest were to be admitted along with the greatest. The Church did not practice as it preached: it allied itself with princes and nobles to crush the masses into serfs: but it could never quite undo its faith by its faithlessness, and it advanced the idea of human equality.

Along with the many evils it inflicted on woman,

evils from which it must be long before we can recover, it did, as I think, awaken some reverence for that sex. I do not mean that it surpassed other religions in this: all religions indeed have had their Madonnas and Holy Families; but the ideal of womanhood consecrated by Christianity in Mary was purer and more tender than that previously prevailing even in Europe. I am indeed putting the matter in its very best light. It can never be forgotten that Christianity took away from Woman, both in Rome and in Germany, the civil and political rights which have never since been restored to her. Yet with all this, there is little doubt that the exaltation of the Madonna mitigated the stern sway of such gods as Jehovah, Jupiter, and Odin; that it preserved the beauty and grace of the goddesses, while adding graciousness, humility, and the love that endures; and that it taught rude and warlike nations that it was noble, not weak, to be loyal to the sentiment and moral genius of woman.

These appear to me the only religious and moral benefits by which we can offset the evils wrought by Christianity. With regard to other kinds of benefit it has, I know, been the fashion to credit that system with the learning—such as it was—preserved and acquired during the middle ages. But in truth the evolution of the world simply went on beneath and through the terrible oppression which it brought upon

the human mind; it went on despite the system, not because of it. Christianity destroyed no popular superstitions. It did not deny the existence of pagan deities, but merely degraded them into devils, and left them to haunt the world even now as goblins and imps. What pleasant fables were told of the gods were transferred to its own saints and angels. This has proved indeed an incidental advantage to Comparative Mythology, which can now gather up the myths of European paganism from the lives and legends of the saints; but the Church would hardly accept the thanks of Science for that, if offered. In its Day of Supremacy no great man or cause arose against which the Church did not fight. It burnt the best books in the street, and the best men at the stake. It encouraged Art, and pictorial Art it may almost claim to have created. Because the picture had to be to the people what the Bible and all other books are to us to-day, artists arose who painted the Bible, and the legends which made the chief literature, with every circumstance of beauty and impressiveness. Yet though the Church so inspired it also perverted Art. Its great painters have left us endless biblical scenes, holy virgins, and saints, but failed to transmit to us, with any fulness, the life and scenery of their own times. Christianity built grand cathedrals, but beggared the homes of the people for them. The most

we can say for it is that it was the best thing attainable in its time; that it was a necessary phase or chapter in the history of the world; and amid all its immediate evils cherished some vital germs whose growth involved its own dissolution.

CHRISTIANITY.

ITS DECLINE.

I.

THERE are excellent persons who cannot yet hear such a phrase as "the decline of Christianity" without feeling scandalised. They wish it to be considered that it is a false, spurious Christianity which is disappearing, or has disappeared, but that there is a true Christianity which is advancing to take its place. Such may be assured that I do not believe that the high virtues and ideas which they label Christianity are declining; in a further chapter are presented my reasons for thinking that such virtues and ideas can not be justly described as Christianity in any sense; at present I speak of Christianity as it is believed and interpreted by the vast majority of its adherents. And this, I maintain, has already declined. Its name preserves popularity, but only because the real substance of its power—belief in its dogmas and sanctions—has passed away, and it has become

by verbal fiction associated with the enlightened sentiment of the modern age.

By consensus of all great Christian sects, whether Roman, Eastern, or Protestant, the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are—1, the Fall of Man; the corruption of his nature, whereby every person has incurred the penalty of eternal anguish; 2, the Vicarious Atonement of Christ; who by his sufferings and death satisfied the Divine Law, and opened a way of escape from the penalty and anguish to all who by faith accept the benefit of his sacrifice; 3, the deity of Christ; which alone could have made his atonement satisfactory in lieu of the whole human race; 4, the publication of this danger, and the plan of redemption, in an inspired revelation, authenticated by miracles; 5, the eternal blessedness of all who accept and believe this plan or scheme of salvation, and the everlasting torment of those who reject and disbelieve the same.

The various Christian sects may severally demand more than this, but, with unimportant and largely outvoted exceptions, they all hold these dogmas as essential to Christianity. And these dogmas, I affirm, have had their day and declined; and I affirm that only because I believe it can be proved.

Now, to what tribunal are we to look for the verdict upon any system of belief? So far as it is a philosophy we must look to the philosophers; so far as it is a cosmogony we must look to men of science; so far as it is a system of morality we must look to the daily life of mankind. If we seek to know whether the Gnostic philosophy has passed away we look among contemporary philosophers to find if it is held by any school or thinker; if we inquire whether the Ptolemaic cosmogony survives, or the Mosaic, we look to see if any astronomer believes it; and if we find none of those who best understand the subject believing those systems, we recognise them as having declined, even though thousands of the unlearned should be shown holding notions traceable to them. We may appeal to a popular jury when the question arises, not whether such systems are true, but whether they are popularly believed.

But further, we must be certain that our tribunal is not only competent, but impartial. A judge cannot sit in his own case. Thus, in the case of Christianity, there are many learned men who advocate it; but because they are advocates—because they wear the uniform and badge of retained and feed religious attorneys—we can not agree that they shall be judges. The clergy and the ministry as a body must be ruled out; they have too much at stake. Why, what would become of them, their churches and chapels, their livings, their prospects, and their credit, if it should

suddenly be made known to all men that all they have been preaching is a consistent mass of errors? The majority of them are, no doubt, sincere: but self-interest, the long habit of looking mainly at one side, and steady training in opposition to the other side, are influences for casuistry too powerful to be matched by the best intentions. And if in the ranks of those who oppose Christianity it can be shown that they, too, have some interest that may prejudice them, let their names also be struck off. It would, indeed, be difficult to prove that any man can have as much temporal interest in opposing a wealthy and powerful conventionality as in supporting it; but, nevertheless, in order that our verdict may be unquestionable, we must have no special pleaders, no faintest interest that can sway the exact balances of Reason.

II.

Now, how many metaphysicians believe in the total depravity of human nature? How many philosophers, how many anthropologists believe in the utter corruption of the mind and heart of man? How many of such believe that this universal moral villany could be inherited, to say nothing of its originating in the eating of an apple thousands of years ago? How many? Not one. I do not speak of the past, but of the present; it is my contention that, though this system

may once have commanded the assent of thinkers, it is now dead to them. And I may equally demand the page written by any living writer on ethical, or legal, or religious science, or philosophy, in which is defended the idea that the human race is pardoned on condition of the physical sacrifice of an innocent being. And where is the author of our time who defends the wild notion of an eternal punishment—a punishment without end, and consequently without purpose—inflicted on millions for a sin they did not commit, and who have not even determined their own existence? These unnatural dogmas, if proved at all, must be proved by unnatural events. Such events are, of course, claimed; but what is the verdict of historical criticism upon their evidences? What is the verdict of science upon their character? They have fallen beneath criticism. They are utterly discarded by those most competent to deal with questions involving the uniformity of nature.

Thus on every fundamental point, Christianity, as a creed or philosophy, is discarded by the Grand Jury of thought and knowledge in our time. Among those whose competency and whose disinterestedness we know Christianity is without a distinguished defender. There are indeed eminent men who call themselves Christians, and who write eulogies of Christianity without dealing with its substance. Mr. Gladstone, for in-

stance, praises Christianity; but we do not find him ever arguing the truth of its dogmas. He never tells us his opinions on human depravity, vicarious atonement, and eternal hell-fire. But he does let us know what he thinks of the anathemas uttered by both Bible and creed on all who reject those dogmas: he has recently selected the leaders of heresy and theism for honourable mention as exceptionally good men. Such is the ablest living champion of the Church. On Sunday he repeats that the eminent heretics shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly: on Monday he writes to the "Contemporary Review" that they are excellent and spiritual men. Christianity says no man can be saved but by faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Mr. Martineau says he had rather be lost than saved in that way. Mr. Gladstone holds up Martineau as one of the most religious—Christian!—teachers of our time. That is what his Christianity amounts to. But where is any better defence those dogmas are receiving at present in any part of the world?

III.

When we turn to consider Christianity as a moral system, we may be content to accept the verdict of the great masses of the people. We cannot indeed accept the popular opinion as to the philological accuracy with which this or that virtue is called "Christian;" but

we may look to them to declare, not by words, but by actions, whether the moral demands, the moral standard, the maxims and sanctions of Christianity are such as are good to restrain evil, promote good, and to command life. In that remarkable little book entitled "Christianity a Refined Heathenism"—written by the Rev. Mr. Pulleyn, who was a minor canon of Salisbury Cathedral, but has now been sent off on an expedition to the North Pole, to keep him, I suppose, from writing uncomfortable books—a Hindoo offers to become a convert to Christianity provided a clergyman can find a single man really living the life of Christ. The clergyman seeks vainly for a long time, but finally finds the man, as he thinks, in a poor curate who passes his time in praying before the altar of a small church, and who catches a disease, of which he dies, in visiting the sick around him. But even he did not follow Christ, for Christ resisted the established Church and priesthood of his time, and this poor curate supported both. In fact, the Hindoo made a perfectly safe offer. There is not a sane man or woman in England who fulfils the duties prescribed in the New Testament. Do these people around us turn the other cheek when one is smitten? Do they refuse to go to law against each other? Do they give the thief another garment when he has stolen one? Do they decline to resist evil, and let scoundrels have it all their own way? Do they never

ask return of him who has borrowed of them? Do they love their neighbours as themselves, and sell all they have to give it to the poor? Do they have all things in common? Do they believe their friends and children are totally depraved, and treat them as such? These instructions, we are told, must be taken in their spirit, not literally: so a Socinian may justly say, but who, believing them the words of a god, can claim that they require modification by man? But do the people—do Christians—obey even their spirit? Is it in Christ's spirit when if a man has taken our cloak we give him the cat? But does this people, or any people, credit Christ's plain affirmations about a future life? Do they lay up no treasures on earth, but only in heaven? Do they live among their neighbours as if they believed that the millions around them were destined to be tortured in everlasting fires? Do these smiling crowds show the horror, the anguish, which such belief would inevitably bring every moment to a heart of ordinary humanity? If these things be right, then is there still none that doeth good—no not one!

It matters not what compliments to Christianity may be upon the lips of the people if belief of it is not in their hearts, and if their daily lives and actions prove that its morality is unreal to them and impracticable; and that not because it is too high for them, but too low,—the survival of ascetic and fanatical systems, which, as combined, could never have been practiced in any age, and were certainly not practiced by Christ.

John Robert Downes is now (1876) in a London prison for really believing the Bible. In that book he read: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up." Here could be no question of interpretation: St. James' prescription is perfectly plain. It was placed in the hands of Downes by Act of Parliament, as the infallible Word of God. The poor man accepted it in good faith, followed it devoutly where his little daughter lay ill: the child died. Downes is punished for not having followed the course of Asa and called in a physician, even though the Bible says Asa died because he took to the physicians instead of to the Lord. Simple-minded Downes! you are in prison, but you have laid bare the hypocrisy of Christendom!

Thus, whether we listen to the conclusions of Science, Philosophy and Literature on the philosophy and the authentication of Christianity, or whether we listen to the voice of the people, as uttered in actions that speak louder than words, we receive a cumulative verdict that Christianity has a name to live, but is dead.

IV.

It remains for us to inquire why Christianity has declined.

1. Christianity tried to crush Reason, and to arrest the progress of Science. When it arose there were flourishing Schools of Science in Egypt and in Greece. There was a very important School of Jewish philosophers in Alexandria. The extent to which Professor Tyndall finds the theoretical Science of to-day germinating in the works of Lucretius, the high rank still accorded to Aristotle, to Plato, to Pliny, and others, show that important investigations into the nature of things were going on before the Church arose. Seneca writes of magnifying by glass, of refraction, and prismatic colours, the regular course of comets, and central heat of the earth, in a way that harmonises to a large extent with modern Science. Pliny writes similarly about electricity, and he says that Tullus was killed while trying to bring down lightning out of a cloud,—an experiment in which Numa seems to have anticipated Franklin by some 2,500 years! Lucan, writing before Christ, mentions similar experiments. The Phœnicians had advanced Chemistry, many nations metallurgy, and our recent discovery of toughened glass is the recovery of an art mentioned by Pliny.

Against all this research Christianity set itself. Because the schools of Philosophy were not interested n the new Jewish movement, even Paul denounced Science. He talks about the carnal mind. He says that his work is to "cast down reasonings" and bring "every thought captive into the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. x. 5.) We find presently Tertullian boasting that the humblest Christian mechanic knew more than all the sages of Greece; and in his picture of the Day of Judgment, that chief sponsor of Christianity exclaims that he will admire, laugh, exult, when he sees "So many sage philosophers blushing in red hot flames with their deluded scholars; so many celebrated poets trembling before the tribunal not of Minos, but of Christ!"

Christianity having thus taken the side of ignorance against learning, fought hard for its dark fortress; but it could not nail the climbing stars; it succeeded only in making the ascent of knowledge counterpart of its own decline. The best minds grew restless. The Inquisition of Toulouse came into existence in 1229 to prevent inquiry: it ordered all heretics to be buried alive. The utmost fury of the Church was poured out on he Jews, because they maintained with logic and learning their simple monotheism against the Church. They were tortured and burnt in vast numbers. Some monks in the 12th century pretended

to have found on the sepulchre of Jesus a letter from heaven demanding the immediate conversion of the Jews, and as they would not be converted the Rhine ran red with their blood. In Spain the Inquisition put to death over 300,000 heretics. All of which implies that though the Church offered up some millions of thinkers to its dark deity Ignorance,—its sole protecting providence,—yet with all that it had to wane. There appeared finally a man who invented type—the priests said he did it in league with the devil—and from that time the reign of darkness and terror began to decline.

2. Christianity has declined because the piety it tried to cultivate was inharmonious with refined and high sentiment. Its God, demanding blood for his satisfaction, its hell, its devils, were all coarse and revolting. It was hard to worship such a deity. The Church in its ferocity imitated its God very closely. The result was that really refined and spiritual minds began to form themselves into little fraternities and orders, in which they might contemplate purer ideals, with something like masonic secresy. A vast deal of quiet heresy went on in the Church, without any doctrinal promulgation, of that kind which finally disclosed itself in Tauler, Madame Guion, Fenelon, and others. A long history, not likely to be written, preceded those quietists and mystics. Carlyle has

derived from old chronicles this significant incident of 550 years ago. In the year 1322 the Markgraf Friedrich of Misnia, having returned from his wars, and while his country was reviving under peace, was entertained at Eisenach by a dramatic representation of the "Ten Virgins." It was performed by the clergy and their scholars. "But," says the chronicle, "when it came to pass that the Wise Virgins would give the foolish no oil, and these latter were shut out from the bridegroom, they began to weep bitterly, and called on the saints to intercede for them; who, however, even with Mary at their head, could effect nothing from God; but the Foolish Virgins were all sentenced to damnation. Which things the Landgraf seeing and hearing, he fell into a doubt, and was very angry; and said 'What then is the Christian Faith, if God will not take pity on us, for intercession of Mary and all the Saints?' In this anger he continued five days; and the learned men could hardly enlighten him to understand the Gospel. Thereupon he was struck with apoplexy, and became speechless and powerless: in which said state he continued bedrid two years and seven months, and so died, being then fifty-five." This stern mediæval warrior, dying broken-hearted at his first realization of the divine cruelty, was forerunner of the old mystics from Tauler and Thomas-a-Kempis who came soon after him, to

Behmen and Swedenborg, all fleeing from the hard barbarous theology as from a City of Destruction, and taking refuge in the sweet illusion that every text and creed meant something precisely different from what it said. Madame Guion had her vision of one whom she met bearing a pitcher and a furnace, wherewith she would quench the flames of hell, and burn up Paradise, in order that God might be loved without fear or hope of reward. Fenelon was caught up with the same longing for a God of Love as his friend (Madame Guion), and for this he was with her persecuted by Bossuet and others. The Pope (Innocent VIII.) said, "Fenelon's fault is too great love of God; his enemies' fault is too little love of their neighbour." Fenelon was degraded and exiled for preaching divine love, without making enough of demonaic terrors; Tauler, à Kempis, Zwoll, Böhme, all who aspired to a sweet mystical piety, were persecuted by the Church, though now it is ready to claim their piety and genius in its own credit.

There is nothing more subtle, more all-pervading, than the influence that flows forth from a pure exalted human being; and when that influence is found more potent outside of a church than inside it, and when a system is such that it has no place for that influence,—has to degrade its living in the name of its dead saints —knows nothing better to do with a Fenelon than

banish him,—why it is pretty certain that the candlestick of that Church is removed out of its place.

3. Another main cause of the decline of Christianity has been the antagonism between its moral system and the laws and needs of human nature. All that was unique in the moral code of Christianity was based not on the actual wants of man but the fancied needs of God. Certain old notions inherited from a distant past that God was jealous of human pleasure and required sacrifices unrelated to man's moral advantage, had become embodied in the system. Jesus warned those around to go and learn the meaning of the saying "I desire not sacrifice but only charity," but they never did learn the meaning of it; the vast majority do not know the meaning of it yet; and so the Church proceeded for ages on the principle that the more happiness man or woman gave up the more was God pleased. The primitive Church was as hard, dismal, unlovely as any remote Scotch town on a Sabbath. But gradually, in the course of centuries, human nature conquered it.

Thirteen hundred years ago a handsome young man left the world and went to live in a tomb. That was his and the Church's idea of being Saint, and he was canonised as St. Benedict. There in his tomb he had a dream of a maid to whom he had been betrothed, and in his horror at such a

sinful dream he rolled himself in thorns until his bdoy was bleeding at every pore. The jungle of thorns was thenceforth regarded as sacred, they were carefully cultivated, and people went there from all parts of the Catholic world to acquire sanctity by piercing themselves with thorns. But seven hundred years later St. Francis d'Assisi, he who used to preach to the birds as his sisters, went to visit the spot; he saw some monks lacerating themselves amid the thorns; he went away and got some roses and planted them in front of the thorns. The monks then began to attend to the roses; nay, gradually they left the thorns to wither, cultivated the others, until after a time no thorns remained but roses only. Just seven centuries the lesson took, that a rose is as sacred as a thorn! The story is a fair type of how human nature steadily conquered the dismal asceticism and thorn-worship of the Church. The asceticism lingered only in nunneries and monasteries; the people and their priests together mingled in dances and festivals. But all this meant the decline of Christianity, which in its essence was opposed to joy, opposed to marriage, and overshadowed life with apprehensions for the present and terrors of the future.

Puritanism, both in Germany and England, attempted to revive the old asceticism, but they are going the same way. Their ugly Sabbath is departing; their

dismal temples are being adorned; their rigid exactions of human nature are being relaxed; but all of these features of liberalism are contrary to Christianity,—in plain discord with its dogmas, which teach horror of this world as a thing accursed, horror of human nature as corrupt, and the fearful apprehension of fiery torments awaiting us all.

V.

These are a few of the many causes which superinduced the decline of Christianity. Those causes mastered the Church as it existed before the Reformation. The discovery of printing, and the speedy diffusion of the Bible, shattered the Church; but each of the many sects which started up under the Reformation repeated something of the same kind, as it were, in embryonic phases. An effort was made to cast human life again in the old Syrian moulds prescribed by the Bible, and by Christian traditions. The whole world judaised. But it has been with the same result. Christianity in its Protestant forms has tried to renew some things that the Catholic Church has unlearned by long and costly experience. It came into sharp collision with the needs of everyday life, with the pursuit of wealth, with the enterprise of the world. It is now taught to a world that cannot believe, and cannot practice it.

The reality of it has passed away. Its name now represents only the effort of a lucrative institution to survive into and through a civilization built up point for point against its protest and its errors. That effort may continue for a time, but it is hopeless.

There is a Scandinavian fable which illustrates the subtlety of those forces which bring death to a thing leaving it for a little the form and semblance of life. Mimir, the craftsman, was challenged by another craftsman, Amilias, who boasted that he had made a suit of armour which no stroke could dint, to equal that feat, or own him the second smith then living. Then Mimir forged a sword so fine of edge that it cut a thread of wool floating on the water. Dissatisfied with that, Mimir broke the blade to pieces, welded in red hot fire for three days, tempered it with milk, and brought out a sword that severed a ball of wool floating on the water. But still the edge was blunt to Mimir: he returned to his smithy, and worked in secret, and by means unknown to any but himself he fashioned the sword Mimung. And now Amilias, encased in his impenetrable armour, sat down in presence of assembled thousands, and bade Mimir strike him. Mimir struck with his sword; the blow was noiseless; after it the craftsman who had been struck merely remarked that he felt strangely. Whereon Mimir said, "Shake

thyself." Amilias did so, and he fell in two halves, never to swing hammer more. This may be originally the fable of a giant iceberg, smitten by a sunbeam, parting asunder; but it is the history also of the spiritual sunbeam, whose touch may seem to leave some great error unharmed, when the first agitation will reveal that it is cloven asunder,—dead.

CHRISTIANITY.

ITS AFTERGLOW.

I.

A SALIENT characteristic of this century has been the effort to restate Christianity in some way that would secure it from that hard collision with the best tendencies of the age into which Catholicism and Calvinism alike had brought it. When Independence was born in America a hundred years ago, it recognised instinctively the foe of Liberty; it launched its bolt straight at the throne of Christianity, destroying its authority in civil government, affirming that the true society could only be built up in freedom from its interference, in direct reversal of the assumption of ages that all government and civilisation must be based upon it. When that Republic entered upon this century, its progress was already sufficient to justify the brave free-thinkers who founded it. Every people of the old world knew, every priest knew, that free and happy societies were growing up in the New

World, with order, arts, and education, unfettered by the ecclesiastical systems and creeds which had so long pretended to carry with them the favours of Heaven. The present Archbishop of Canterbury once defended the union of Church and State in this country, by pointing out that in America their severance had naturally led to the growth of Socinianism. It was a very ingenuous argument, and has the advantage of being true. Liberated from all disabilities imposed on free inquiry, no longer bribed by the social or pecuniary endowments of an established creed, the human mind found in America its first opportunity to prosecute freely and fully those religions, revisions, and criticisms which gained a certain embodiment in Unitarianism. This movement is to be distinguished from all the radicalism and iconoclasm of France, England, and America which preceded it, and conquered for it the liberty under which it could grow. It was, in both England and America, a movement in the interest of Christianity, not against it. The Unitarians believed that the common theology represented not real Christianity but its abuses. They were encouraged in this belief by the important discovery that the great central dogma of all the churches—the Trinity—was totally unfounded and unscriptural.

An earnest, honest and learned criticism, turned during the last generation to the work of searching

out the genuine text of the New Testament and its real sense, has amply justified the misgivings of the Unitarians as to the scriptural authenticity of the dogmas of orthodox Christianity. The task crowned by the splendid discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus by Von Tischendorf and the invaluable critical labours of that scholar, may be regarded as now complete; and the pious frauds of fifty generations are now exposed. A story is told of a clergyman, who, in conversation with a Unitarian fellow-traveller urged against him the text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses. "Is it possible," said the Unitarian, "that you do not know that the text is a forgery?" "Well, yes," replied the clergyman, "but I didn't know you knew it." That candid clergyman had but attempted to carry on in an age when it is not so safe the old priestly plan of theologically manipulating the Bible while that book was reserved for the clergy's exclusive inspection. Porson ninety years ago pointed out that no Greek MSS., but only the Vulgate, had anything about the three witnesses, and so expunged from every honest Bible the only text that even faintly suggested a Trinity.

It has now been proved that it is equally by fraud that the idea of the incarnation of God in Christ has been imported into the New Testament. For those who have not at hand Von Tischendorf's last revision,

and Dr. Davidson's introduction to his own excellent translation of it, I may here mention the more salient instances in which the readers of the English version are deceived with regard to the sense of the New Testament on important points. In Col. ii, 2, "God, even Christ,"—"Christ" is a gloss. In Rom. ix, 5, we have the phrase "Christ *came*, who is over all God blessed for ever;" the word "came" has been supplied by the translators, a period has been withheld where usage renders it natural; and the true reading is: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ after the flesh. God, who is over all, be blessed for ever. Amen." In Titus ii, 13, usage equally requires a comma to divide two parts of a sentence skilfully welded together: instead of "The glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," the comma which would have certainly appeared in an undoctrinal text makes it the "appearing of our Great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ." In Luke xxiv, 51–2, the words stating that Jesus was "carried up into heaven, and they worshipped him" are not genuine. In Phil. ii, 6, instead of Christ's being said to have "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," the rendering is he "did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped at." In 1 Tim. iii, 16, "God was manifest in the flesh" has been made out by an ingenious change of the Greek

ὅς (who) into Θεὸς (God). How far the English translators were parties to such frauds we cannot tell, though we must suspect that they knowingly perverted some important texts,—*e.g.*, 2 Tim. iii, 16, where "Every scripture inspired by God, is profitable" is made to read that "all scripture *is* given by God, and is profitable." Those translators excluded from their work the ablest Hebrew scholar of the time (Broughton) whose honesty was too pronounced; and it is not a happy augury of veracity in the coming revised translation, that the friend of Von Tischendorf, the learned and incorruptible Dr. Samuel Davidson, should have no part in it.

The dogmas of a Trinity and the co-eternal deity of Christ being discovered to have been impositions on the Bible, the general authenticity of the book has been weakened. But while the earlier Unitarians maintained the inspiration of the book, they saw that the most momentous dogmas were not so clearly stated in it, that one need give them entire credence. There were texts for them, indeed, but also texts against them. Some of these dogmas were morally repulsive,—such as atonement through the blood of Christ, and the eternal and physical character of Hell,—and when Christianity was relieved of these it presented a very different aspect. When the more deforming dogmas were removed many a

long hidden treasure was revealed. The beautiful discourses and parables of Christ, his pure life, his heroic fidelity, his martyrdom, acquired an impressiveness which they could never possess while they were all merely incidental—at best ancillary—to the awful and mysterious doctrines by which alone it was said, men were to be saved from eternal anguish. It was inevitable that the system should be seen and judged apart from its worst corruptions. This necessity appeared in various countries, and, leaving now the sectarian embodiments of it, we may say that there flowered out of the most living branch of Christendom what is called Liberal Christianity. This is the Afterglow of that day which has set,—sequel of the thousand years in which the system in its ecclesiastical and dogmatic forms had ruled, and then reigned, and finally declined.

II.

It would be difficult to set too high an estimate upon the learning and industry which have been brought to the task thus briefly described: inestimable has been the light cast upon the life and character of Christ, and the history of his time. No dawn ever broke from the East more resplendent than that with which the research of the West has flooded the East itself. But as it has proceeded one thing has become increasingly plain,

namely, that Liberal Christianity is no real dawn at all, but a brief Afterglow.

It began to waver almost as soon as it arose. Thus, when it was discovered that the Trinity is an unfounded dogma, the question had to be met; what, then, is the real teaching of the New Testament concerning Christ? The Bible is not Trinitarian, but is it Unitarian? Certainly not, that is in the ordinary sense of that term. The New Testament writers have various views of Jesus: one believes him the Jewish Messiah; another believes him the personified creative energy of God; another thinks him a mysterious divine emanation; but there is no warrant in that book for believing Jesus to have been merely human in his nature. No mere man would have said "My father is greater than I," or "I am the resurrection and the life." Then the New Testament is full of miracles, which cannot be denied without tearing the book to pieces: especially do all the hopes held out by it to believers centre in the bodily resurrection of Christ from death. Now all these things were as shocking to reason as the dogmas of God's wrath and hell-fire had been to moral sentiment. To men who had begun to think, there was something repugnant in this idea of a deity working through a secondary personage, and something inconsistent with simplicity and nature in the idea of primogeniture introduced with the notion

of a specially favoured, beloved, or only-begotten son of God. So the next step had inevitably to be taken. This was to impeach the accuracy and authority of the record, to claim that it was written after popular tradition by superstitious men, each with some theory to support; and yet hold that there is reflected in it the wisdom and greatness of Christ with sufficient clearness to constitute the essence of a religion. It was still maintained by some, and is now, that even after the miracles are gone, and the supernatural authentication of both Bible and Christ gone, and Jesus stands simply as a good and wise man, and a martyr, there may yet remain a system of Christianity worthy to be maintained and extended as the right religion of mankind.

In all this one thing was clear, namely that some motives were at work, whether consciously or not, beyond love of truth, to induce men to hold on so pertinaciously to the Christian name after it had ceased to represent a living and credible thing. These motives have been abundantly displayed in recent controversies. Some of them are very poor indeed. To one, Christianity seems to be a kind of spell, the very name having become a fetish. I do not know that such are to be held responsible for their word-worship, for ages of superstition have cast the mould of their brains. But argument would be wasted on

them. They are like those who gather at Rome around the Bambino of Ara Coèli, the little effigy of Christ said to have been carved out of an olive-tree on the Mount of Olives, and painted by St. Luke: even now some devotees believe that the security of pontifical Rome depends on that very ugly Bambino, though it was that which disgusted Gibbon as he looked upon its worship, and led him to write the history which was one of the first blows that weakened not only the pontificate but Christianity itself. Others hold on to Christianity because it is a name to conjure with. He who drops it loses what is called politely *prestige*, so called by persons who do not reflect that *prestige* is a foreign word meaning deceit. Though we reject the authority of Christianity as a history and a system of truth, we must keep up the name for its popularity! This is too much in the vein of Mephistopheles who advises Faust to "take care of words, and leave things to themselves." We need not consider his advice, nor that of those who praise Christianity for the sake of the people, when they know that the word means to the people a totally different thing from what it means to them. Others hold on to the word for political reasons. Great national interests have become bound up with the Christian religion, and they think these can be preserved only so long as the name lasts; so they wish us to think as we please, but

only call our thoughts Christianity. But we may feel pretty sure that any interest which rests upon so transparent a falsehood will have to find a better basis, or else fall, some time or other, and it may as well be now as at any other time. It need not stand on the order of its going! And the same may be said to those who dread the moral consequences upon the masses of their discovery of the long deception which has been practised upon them. The greater danger, surely, will arise from trying to continue the deception after it has been exposed. When the time came in Rome when two soothsayers could not meet each other without laughing, Rome had not much farther to go before her fall. And we find much the same state of things here, when eminent clergymen are driven to apologise for calling themselves Christians, and others smile at creeds they are under oath to preach.

Somewhat more honourable, but still quite fanciful, is the motive of those who hold on to the Christian name because they think it necessary in order to preserve the continuity of our religious development. They maintain that though the England of Charles I. is very different from the England of Victoria, yet there is a national continuity preserved with the old name and the old flag; and so, they maintain, the evolution of religion must go on under the old Christian name and its symbols. Even were it

admissible that religion should be compared with a national life, there is a fallacy in supposing that the real continuity of a nation depends upon a name or a flag. Under various names,—Britain, Albion, England,—under many flags, this nation has preserved its continuity and its greatness. Even in a nation, continuity is just the thing that cannot be broken. It is like the individuality of a man who, though he may pass under a pet name in his childhood, a nickname in his boyhood, a family name in his youth, a title in his manhood, is the same man through all. But apart from this, we contend that it is the peculiar glory of a religion that it is not national, nor even ethnical, but human. Unless the absurdity be contended for that Christianity represents a world-evolution its continuity can only mean the self-righteousness of a group of nations or races, in which case the theory aims a blow at that continuity of the Religion of Humanity, which a miserable sectarianism denies. Humanity cries out in our age, "While one says, 'I am of Buddha,' another, 'I am of Mohammed,' another, 'I am of Christ,' are ye not all sectarian and self-righteous?"

III.

I know that the men who hold the Christian name on this fanciful theory of "continuity" are not consciously sectarian; but however broad or

human they may be individually, their tribute to the religion of a single race is finally delivered into the hands of the narrowest form of their religion,—the form in which it is understood by the masses, and maintained by all Christian priesthoods. Some years ago the noble Garibaldi, by his heroism, won a magnificent victory for the freedom of Italy from Papal tyranny, against the will of his king, who was held fast by his master in France, Napoleon III. who, in turn, was pledged to uphold his master, the Pope, and not allow the King of Italy to invade his dominions. But when Garibaldi gained his victory, and all Italy was filled with enthusiasm, the king of that country was unable to suppress him, or to restore the conquered province to the Pope, because of the people. But the thing was managed in this way. A very liberal Italian minister negotiated with Garibaldi to deliver the advantage he had won into his highly liberal hands. Garibaldi could not doubt that in the hands of such a liberal minister the cause would be safe. But when the minister received it, he gave it to his master the king; the king gave it up to his master the French Emperor; the Emperor gave it up to his master, the Pope; and thus the grand achievement of Garibaldi travelled through all the degrees until it strengthened the very tyranny at which his blow was aimed. It is very much the same with the great achievements for freedom of modern Christian liberalism. Some great rationalist wins his province for freedom, and delivers it up to Unitarian Christianity, where its negations are left, and its admissions seized by Nonconformists to reinforce orthodoxy, or the Broad Church steals its fire to give a new lease of life to the Established Church. Thus the rationalist who consents to call himself a Christian, in the very proportion that he is able and eminent, is sending fresh power to prop the throne of superstition. Whatever Christianity may mean at the apex, at the base it means certain gross superstitions and horrible dogmas; those it will represent to the masses; but how can the ignorant be delivered, when it is competent for any priest or preacher to tell them that such and such great scholars and thinkers are Christians? "What!" cries the preacher to the poor working man, who begins to doubt the horrible dogmas, "do you think you know more than Professor Newman, who has joined an organisation for 'the promotion of the principles of Unitarian Christianity,' or than Martineau, who admits Christianity to be true, or more than Dean Stanley, or Bishop Colenso, Dr. Jowett, and other great Christians?" The preacher is suppressing truth, suggesting falsehood: no one of the men he names believes the Christianity which he is imposing on that working man: yet it is those great men

themselves who, by using a title of double meaning, enable the double-tongued to forge from their reputation new chains for the human mind. Nor can they prevent this result so long as they profess belief in Christianity. All their refined qualifications, their textual criticisms, their philosophisings about continuity, and the rest, have no relation to the common sense and daily life of mankind. And it is most wonderful that they do not see that a religion which requires all those "ifs" and "buts," and requires critical commentaries in order to be made true, is thereby disqualified from being a faith for mankind. It is an infatuation to think that a religion can be real to masses of men which is anywise dependent on ancient Hebrew and Greek books, or upon the scholastic criticism and metaphysics of this or any other age.

IV.

Consider the various theories that have arisen under the Afterglow. One says, "Christianity means love to God and love to man. Christ himself says, On those two things hang all the law and the prophets." But, we ask, how about Christ's other sayings, that men must be saved by believing on him, and if they do not believe on him, must go into eternal despair, where the worm never dies, and the fire is not quenched?

Oh, they argue, Christ doesn't mean that; he means something else than that: he means the fire *will* be quenched, the worm *will* die. Very possibly. No doubt examination of the original Greek, and a long drill in exegesis and hermeneutics, will enable my neighbour the blacksmith to find that the texts must be modified. But he may wish a religion adapted to a poor man who doesn't know Greek, and who, if he is to depend on authority at all, will naturally depend, not on ours, but that of the sect in which he was born.

Another theorist tells us that Christianity means the "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man." But, we urge, Christ several times repudiated that brotherhood, declared that the Jews were chosen above all races, called the alien Canaanites "dogs," who had no right to the religious advantages of Jews, told his apostles to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. "Ah, but those texts occur in doubtful books, and they don't mean what they seem to say." Very likely not, I answer; but how can you maintain before the uncritical masses that Christianity teaches human brotherhood, when the only books they have about Christ make him teach the contrary, and when the whole history of Christianity shows its representatives hating and killing others in its name?

Then a third comes forward to affirm that the life

and character of Christ were perfect, and that these supply the basis of a credible Christianity. What man needs is a perfect human and divine type, and Christ is that. But where do they find such a Christ? They have to evolve him from their inner consciousness, or by elaborate comparative criticism, for certainly no such being is plainly reported in the Bible. The Christ of the New Testament is obviously egotistical and fanatical. He attacks with physical violence persons engaged in an honest calling, and injures their property; he denounces his neighbours as vipers and children of hell; he believes in ghosts, devils, and in eternal fires for a portion of the human family. If we turn from that Christ to another aspect in which he is represented, he is equally a type of character which no man would wish his son to imitate. Unresisting even to abjectness, asserting his own perfections to such an extent that his meekness becomes affectation, telling us himself that he said a thing merely for effect, decrying the world, denouncing the rich, denying the affections, even turning away with contempt from his mother and sisters, we see in this other Christ a type of character perfunctory and spiritless. Now, understand, I do not believe in the least that such were the real characteristics of Christ; I believe that the various types of character ascribed to him would be impossible in any one man, and am

quite sure that they are mere sectarian theories, asceticisms, fanaticisms of the time personified, and called by Christ's name for the same reason that people still call their little schemes and schools Christianity,—that is, because the name carried weight among the people they wished to conciliate. But though we can by elaborate criticism relieve Christ personally of most of these faults, and find a great heroic man there (though no model) it can only be done by abandoning Christianity in any conceivable shape. For if we deny that he is responsible for the gross demonology and violent conduct ascribed to him, we are left without any record of his virtues which may not be equally denied. So soon as we found a system on him we challenge such denial from rival systems. It is dishonest to go through the New Testament and put everything you like on one side, and all you dislike on the other, and say one parcel is true and the other false. That is using false weights and measures. Where would science be if men of science decided on the facts of Nature by their preferences, and a man were permitted to discredit a discovered law because he had a distaste for it? What should we say of a judge who should charge a jury to believe so much of the evidence as they found it comfortable to believe? This kind of dishonesty, scorned everywhere else, is even the general rule in theological

discussion. This is proved by the fact that Christians, even liberal ministers, do not hesitate to label all the virtues "Christian,"—Christian charity, Christian liberty, and I wonder they do not say Christian gravitation and electricity,—when they know that there is not one moral law or maxim of Christianity which was not the common currency of all great religions before the birth of Christ. Nor do they hesitate to speak of pagan darkness and heathen idolatry as if other religions monopolised ignorance and superstition, while Christianity monopolised the excellencies and the light. All of which is dishonest and immoral. Christ's assault on them that sold doves is as much a part of the Bible as Paul's chapter on charity. Mohammed's chapter on charity is as much a part of his religion as his paradise of pleasure. Men have no right to take their own system at its best and that of others at its worst.

V.

Such injustice, such unfair glozing over of difficulties, are the signs of a system in decay. No longer able to live by fair means it has recourse to means not fair. There are painful indications that the Afterglow is following the plan of the dogmatic day which preceded it, trying to prolong itself artificially by deliberately discouraging honesty of research. The

Unitarians of this country have done their utmost to try and make Christianity consistent with truth and freedom, but they have shown that it is impossible. If I apply to the Unitarian Association they will admit me only under a rule that makes me say I am a Christian. It may be a falsehood, but they will not investigate that; or it may be that my Christianity would be of that kind which would burn a free-thinker as Calvin burned Servetus, and yet I shall be admitted; but if I frankly say, "I believe in God and in immortality; I love Christ and regard him as the best and wisest of men, and yet I do not think it honest to say I am a Christian,"—then the fundamental law of their organisation excludes me. By so doing they encourage me to tell a lie. Every young liberal offered their aid and sympathy on condition of pronouncing their shibboleth—"Christianity"—is encouraged to shape his faith to suit his interest. So all their professed liberality, all their publication of the works of dead radicals like Parker, cannot atone for the daily and hourly wrong they inflict on the living by dishonouring the principle of veracity and fidelity, by rewarding compliance with their creed, and punishing, however indirectly, the independence which will not pronounce it. Theodore Parker did not find it his duty to disown the Christian name; but there are others who do find it a duty to

do so, and among these the congregation he founded, and nine-tenths of those who knew and sympathised with him while he was living. These believe, however mistakenly, that they represent a tendency of the religious life of our time. What cheer has Unitarianism for these? The English Unitarians have an honourable history, and no page of it is brighter than the last; but they can retain what they have won only by following up their advance. They have reduced the ancient chain on thought to one link—the Christian name,—but that, unless it be broken, will increasingly preserve in all the galling intolerance of the links that are destroyed.

> The painful warrior, famousèd for fight,
> After a thousand victories once foiled,
> Is from the books of honour razèd quite,
> And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.

A fundamental rule designates the object of the Association to be "promotion of the principles of Unitarian Christianity," and under it all the Brahmos of India, with Keshub Chunder Sen at their head, all the Theists and rationalists of England or America, —Emerson and Carlyle, Spencer and Huxley, Thomas Scott and Miss Cobbe,—are excluded. And this is the religion of love to man,—of Fatherhood and Brotherhood!

No, it is the mere Afterglow of a Religion, preserv-

ing, even in its faint ghostly light, enough of the semblance of the old dogmatic day which has set, to remind us of the essential errors by which Christianity has perished. It is not within the power of any mind, however ingenious, to liberalise Christianity so far that it will include all humanity in an equal embrace,—Jews and Gentiles, Hindoos, Mohammedans, Buddhists—and draw no line against any man's convictions.

Nor is it yet in the power of any to frame any definition of Christianity, however liberal, which will not rest upon the fatal figment that our race culminated religiously in a small superstitious tribe of Syria over 1800 years ago. We may progress in science, literature, and the arts; but in religion progress ended in Palestine, and the highest civilization must always look backwards, not forwards, for its highest light, truth, and life!

It is on the ruins of that sectarian wall between man and man, on the grave of that retrogressive superstition, that Religion now takes her stand to wait and watch for the morning.

CHRISTIANITY.

THE MORROW.

I.

THERE is a fallacy, surviving even among educated people, as a vague feeling, that there is some causative connection between Christianity and the higher civilisation of the chief nations which profess it. This, we know, is the main argument of the missionary; he confounds the Oriental man by claiming all the science, literature, and arts of Europe as the fruits of Christianity, thereby compelling all of our men of science and culture—though denounced for materialism here—to sanction the dogmas which our sects are sending out there.

It has been already pointed out that there was reflected in Christianity a more refined type of woman, and a higher recognition of her moral influence, by reason of its ideal Madonna, than existed in the European religions which it superseded, though under those woman had larger political rights; also that it held the germs of a higher political *régime* in

its doctrine of the equality of souls before God; and it taught the dignity of labour in its theory that Christ was a poor mechanic. But it would be a serious error to suppose that such ideas are contained only in Christianity. Other and earlier religions have their Madonnas, and their deities incarnate in humble forms, and taught human equality; and if any other of those religions had happened to get the mastery of Europe the same ideas would have been selected out of them. It is race, time, circumstance, which keep the same ideas dormant in one place and develope them in another. These determine religious forms, immeasurably more than religious forms determine them.

As proof of this we have only to consider the condition of Christianity among other races than our own. Forty-five years ago a young man who had graduated with the highest honours at Oxford, filled with zeal for the spread of Christianity, went as a missionary to Aleppo. He lived there and in various regions of the Ottoman empire, where he could fully compare those of his own faith with Moslems. There were Christians of all kinds and degrees. The letters written home by that earnest and orthodox missionary were published in 1856,* and I fear the

* Personal Narrative, in Letters, principally from Turkey, in the years 1830-3. By F. W. Newman. London: Holyoake & Co., Fleet Street. 1856.

book is now out of print. He found that the animosities of the Christians to each other rendered them helpless before the united Turks, and yet that the Turks were anxious to reconcile the Christians—Greek, Roman Catholic, Syriac, and the rest—to each other. While conscious of a desire that Turkish Government should be overthrown, the missionary sees no chance of a worthier successor, "no mark in the Christians of higher qualities." They are "neither strong nor wise nor ingenious nor active-minded." The Turks leave to them freedom of the press, yet the Christians have no books and their intellects were wholly uninstructed. He says that the missionaries there have to leave the Turks and try to convert the Christians. He and the other zealous missionaries with him shrank from the native Christians as "dangerous and faithless allies," and finally they relinquished the idea of building a church there, and came home disheartened.

This is the testimony of one who when he wrote it, and for some time afterwards, was a Christian zealot, —Professor Newman. It shows that low races find their barbarism harmonious with Christianity while advanced races are crediting it with their civilisation.

The Nestorian Christian will kill a man if he works on Sunday. He finds in the book given him as the Word of God as ample warrant for his barbarism as

an Englishman can find in it for his civility. And just the same is true of all other religions.

Mohammedanism, which among Turks turns to a cruel superstition, once blossomed in Persia to a beautiful mystical religion represented by the finest literary age known to Asia.

II.

Professor Newman has related in another work ("Phases of Faith") the impression made upon his mind by a Mussulman mechanic who, having listened to his instruction, remarked that while the English seemed to be superior in everything else, they certainly did not possess a true religion. The devout Oxonian Scholar returned to England with that humble workman's word, and it was a seed cast in the mind of the sower who went forth to sow, among the many which have since borne fruit a hundredfold.

That Mohammedan laid his hand upon the fundamental anomaly of this country. We are a civilised country in everything but one, that is religion; that is barbarous. Its dogmas are derived from barbarous tribes and ages. We do not use their ploughs nor other implements; we do not adopt their science nor their arts; but we establish in the School and the Church their wild superstitions of a world accursed, man vicariously depraved and vicariously redeemed, a

deity demanding blood, and a hell of fire and brimstone. Educated people even in the Churches confess the barbarism of these beliefs by declaring, whenever we state them, that we are caricaturing their faith. We quote them word for word from their creeds and confessions; and yet they say it is misrepresentation and caricature. No doubt it misrepresents them, and it certainly caricatures civilised humanity; but there are the Creeds in the Prayer-book, and in dissenting Confessions, in the Catechisms taught to every generation, and any one may read them. Whatever the educated may secretly read in the dogmas, such is their plain meaning to the child and the unlettered millions.

Now, why is it that civilised England teaches her people a barbarous religion? It is because all progress in civilisation must be by free comparison and selection. In Science we compare fact with fact, theory with theory, and select that which best explains phenomena. If a man made a discovery in India the English man of science does not refuse it because he was a Brahmin. In Philosophy we do not reject a statement by Aristotle because he was a "pagan." We do not in trade refuse the products of Africa, Japan, or any country, because they are from non-Christian producers. And so, freely combining the select advantages of the world, we attain a high mate-

rial and scientific civilisation. We absorb Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, into our literature. We follow the ancient evolutional law of nature, which combined all animal excellences into man,—"the sum of every creature's best;" and which combined single races to make higher races. In religion alone we have arrested the action of this civilising eclectic law upon us. We have isolated our religion, rejected all contributions and criticisms from other religions, cut off the natural streams of influence that would have fed and enlarged it, and compelled the law of progress to pass on over its grave.

It is no consolation to know that all other religions have done the same, as far as they can. It is too true. Every historic religion has detached itself from the living body of humanity, and made itself a mere fragment; each takes up its bit of the dissected map of world-experience and cries, "behold here the round world and all that dwell therein!" There is not a Bible of any race which can be understood without comparison with some other Bible which its devotees scornfully reject. There is no religious prophet or teacher whose words are not made false if he is seen in dislocation, dissociated from other teachers of his time, and set up in rivalry to them. All religions in the world are now crumbling, and all for the same reason. There is a longing for unity among races, and

their sects are sundering them. The expansion of commerce has revealed intellectual and moral treasures in every land: while scholars seek them, priesthoods guard them from exportation and importation. Everywhere sectarianism still stands in the way of the free spiritual commerce of race with race, and the gathering together thereby of the accumulated experiences of all climes and ages, which alone can make a religious civilisation.

III.

But observe now all the signs of our time which tell us what the morrow must be, and what its glorious task!

Within this century the Bible Society has distributed through the world, translated into 150 languages, 131,000,000 Bibles. Yet in a thousand years Christianity has not made one million converts among those "pagan" races who are so glad to get the Bible. Why is that? Simply because the Bible is a human book for any mind that can read it with freedom. Christianity means that it shall not be read as a human book, nor with freedom, but that people must read into it, or extort out of it, certain things which will prove English sects right and all the rest of the world wrong. But the Hindoo, the Arab, do not want any more compulsion of that kind. They have had enough of that. That is just the way they have

been reading the Vedas and the Koran, not to find what was truly there, but what it suited their rulers should be found there. Now this distribution of Bibles from England gives them exactly what they need, a great sacred literature which they can read as free reasoning beings, under no compulsion to believe its legends or construct dogmas out of its poetry. Those Bibles will, in the end, liberate them from thraldom to the letter of their own books. It will supply keys to their Scriptures, and unseal the eyes of millions to see that truth and beauty are monopolised by no race on earth. As for Christ, reverence for him in the East has not had to wait for the diffusion of the Bible. For many centuries oriental writers have held him in love and honour as a great and good teacher, and they have some beautiful traditions concerning him unknown to the West. They reject with indignation the notion that Jesus was a Christian. The Jews know that. Not long ago I met a Rabbi and he said to me, "Jesus was a great Jew, and if he were to reappear in Christendom he would be invited to preach in all the Synagogues, and crucified in all the Churches." With what terms of admiration do Keshub Chunder Sen and the Brahmos, and Moulvi Syed Ameer Ali, in his "Life of Mohammed," speak of Christ! And yet they never dream of becoming Christians, which would mean identifying Christ and themselves with

all the wickedness and cruelties of Christian history, and with the vulgar dogmas of missionaries,—dogmas just as repulsive as their own. The Bible and Christ are welcomed among them as liberators: Christianity comes trying to forge both into fresh chains for them, and it is rejected.

But while the Bible Society is thus breaking sectarian chains for the rest of the world, what is to break the chains of the people here at home? There are very few readers of the Bible in this country who get at its real meaning. It requires a great deal of comparison with other books,—the New Testament as well as the Old. Even if people try to read intelligently they have so long been reading it with prepossessions derived from ignorant preachers that every sentence reflects their own prejudice instead of the thought that wrote it. What we need here is precisely what they need there, namely Bibles that we may read freely, under no compulsion to believe their fables, nor to read out of them what is not in them, to suit the exigencies of systems. We shall learn that in every age and nation truth has been shining abroad like the sunlight, and beneath it have everywhere bloomed the flowers of virtue. We shall learn what are weeds in our own soil by seeing the corresponding weeds, flourishing where we are not bribed by any interest or custom to pronounce them flowers or fruits.

The Bibles of the world will mutually unlock each other, and a great interchange of world-experiences take place from which universal religion shall emerge.

I hold it a great promise of the morrow that a German orientalist, naturalised in England, and associated with its oldest University (Professor Max Muller), has summoned the scholars of Europe to translate into every Western language the Bibles of the world. They have responded and are now at their work. When those books are gathered together they who now hear only the voice of Syria and Greece will hear the voice of Humanity. We shall learn that errors which have gained new vigour in the West by being grafted on our civilisation, have flourished in many lands ages ago, have been tried and found wanting, and that what we have been sending out to ancient races as divine truth have been the extinct fossils of their own fabulous ages.

The Morrow, then, will not take away our Bible. On the contrary it will for the first time really give us our Bible, by illuminating it. It will enlarge it by adding to it the manifold Scriptures, now rejected, which make up the Canon of revelation to Humanity.

IV.

Nor will the Morrow take away Christ. It will restore him to the World from which patristic meta-

physics have removed him. It will no longer be considered any degradation to call him a man. He will be seen as one of a high and holy fraternity of seers and teachers, stretching through all ages, whom no one race can claim, who speak for universal reason and right.

Every new day must build on the work of the days that have passed and sum them up to its larger total. The day that has passed of every religion has been sectarian, national; but that means also that there has been a distribution of labour. It was not without its value. Each race has given its wealth and learning to the work of preserving and popularising its own records and traditions to an extent which could only have resulted from a belief that the whole of truth was with them. They builded better then they knew. They have each brought their little block of stone, under impression that it was the whole temple, to a point where comparative study may take it up and fit it to every other block, that the sacred edifice of Humanity may arise.

Already we have discovered signs of the universality of the great Teachers with which the sects of the world label themselves so exclusively. One sign is the moral names they bear. It is rare that any great religious founder bears the name given him by his family, or a name distinctive of his tribe

or nation. Their names are titles conferred by the moral sense and enthusiasm of mankind. Sakya Muni lives in the ages as Buddha,—the enlightened. The great Hindoo law-giver bears the Vedic name Manu, signifying the Father of Mankind. The family name Ahmed becomes Mohammed, "the praised." We do not know the original names of some great religious teachers,—Zoroaster, for instance, a title variously interpreted. Nor do we know the name first given to Christ. Jesus (meaning Saviour) and Christ (the anointed) are manifestly titles bestowed after his work had ended and his greatness been recognised. Thus in their very names these men are signed with their relation to the moral consciousness of man, and raised out of the national into the universal spirit.

Another notable fact is this. The influence of the greatest religious Teachers has been felt mainly in other countries than their own. Not in India, Buddha's native land, does Buddhism flourish; the religion of Zoroaster is almost unknown in Persia, where it originated; neither Moses nor Christ is the chosen prophet of Palestine. This rule, like the other, is not invariable, but it is general enough to verify the ancient proverb that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country. Nor is the reason far to seek. Partly, no doubt, it is because no mass of people have the culture required to recognise greatness in guise

of the familiar; but mainly it is because the great man always comes as a reformer, and is brought into immediate collision with the prejudices, priesthoods, powers of his own locality. His local warfare is left behind when his words travel to other regions. The Pharisees of England never dream that Christ meant them when he rebuked their class in Jerusalem. Garibaldi was welcomed by lords in England, but many an English Garibaldi has been despised and rejected. The facts show that all men hunger and thirst for truth, and always welcome it when permitted to receive it; and their rulers more readily permit it when it comes as foreign learning than when it means internal reform and schism. But it also shows that the power by which the great prevail is a pure human power, detached from local complications, freed from tribal and sectarian paltriness. Thus the teacher whom Judea crucified triumphed in Greece and Rome under the Græco-Roman name of Christ; and he did so through the force of another great man who cast aside his provincialism even to his name, Saul,* and went forth to translate Jesus from a person to a spirit

* It is possible (even though Chrysostom denies it), that Paul was preferred not only because it was Hellenistic, but because Saul seemed related to σαλεύειν, to persecute, and Paul recalled παύσασθαι, to protect.

and restate his doctrine so that it might become, in a high sense, all things to all men. That was the culmination of Christ's true influence: it has been already related how his spirit passed away and his lifeless form was entombed in Christianity.

But behold a third badge of the great religious Teachers. Each nation preserves the legends and marvels connected with the founder of its own religion, because it thinks that these give him an authority above all the other prophets. But now comes Comparative Mythology, and shows the legends and marvels to be substantially the same. The legends of Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Christ so closely resemble each other that they cease to give a distinctive authority to either, so far as his teaching claims to reveal things beyond universal reason. Jesus descended from heaven, was born of a virgin named Mary, wrought miracles, and ascended to heaven from the top of the Mount of Olives where Catholics still worship his last footprint on earth. But it was already on record that Buddha descended from Heaven, was immaculately conceived and born of Maia, wrought miracles, then ascended from Adam's Peak in Ceylon where Buddhists still adore his last footprint on earth. Two hundred millions believe the story about Jesus; three hundred millions believe the same about Buddha. And yet with the same

miraculous authentication one of these prophets is held to have revealed that after death each soul passes before a heavenly Judge, and thence to endless joy or torment; while the other prophet, with the same credentials, taught that at death each soul sinks to everlasting repose, if not annihilation. What will those Oriental people think when they find from those millions of Bibles sent out to them that the same signs and wonders which are attesting one thing about the future in Asia are attesting a different thing in Europe? And what will our Christians think when they presently have the Eastern Bibles and make the same discovery? Why the light of the new day will dawn for both East and West. They will see in the legends and fables the broidery of the mantle which falls from prophet to prophet. Its decoration is the hereditary folklore of the ignorant, but it is sacred to them, and their superstitions follow only where their hearts have gone. It is the deep homage of the poor that they believe of Buddha all the legends told of Vishnu, or bring their sweetest fables about Apollo or Minerva to twine them around the brow of Christ and Mary. The legends and miracles concerning the great personal religions, being nearly the same, can not on the morrow attest their several and contrarious visions; but all the more will those signs attest that each was in his time and place the highest, truest man;

a true saviour of the people about whose neck they clung; who touched the depth of their heart and revealed its treasures; at whose grave women planted mystical flowers as they wept for themselves and their children; and all transmitted a blessed memory that gradually called around it the old fables which had hallowed every prophet till he passed into abstract deification, then fallen on the shoulders of the next worthy to wear their emblem. The miracle is not God's sign, but the homage of the poor. And when this is realised, as the morning shall reveal it, then shall each great Soul rise from his sectarian tomb, and take his place in the fraternity of Saviours, and each shall bring in his arms all his sheaves from the seed he has sown in human hearts, for the common garner of Humanity.

V.

But, ah, you say, what will the morrow reveal to us about God, and about immortality? What a confession of the emptiness of all sectarian religions that at the end of so many ages they have left the educated world without certainty on the very points—God and Immortality—upon which they have concentrated their power! So many millions sacrificed, so much wealth diverted from man to God and from the present to the future, only to leave us in scepticism at last!

Of one thing be sure,—the Morrow will reverse all

that. It is plain that no more light is to be got from the sectarian day that has set, or from its Afterglow that now fades. Christian enthusiasm is spent. The strongest manifestations of its life in our time have been Mormonism, Shakerism, Moodyism, and Spirit-rapping. Sectarianism has run to seed in Christendom, and just as much in the religions of Asia. All our hope of new light now comes of the liberation of the human mind in every part of the world from these other-worldly methods which have so conspicuously failed; and the concentration of the combined energies of all the mind, heart and wealth of the earth to the work of civilising religion and raising it to equality with our material and scientific progress. We have found that gazing into the sky does not reveal God, now let us try what will come of exploring the earth, and man, and history. The Chinese sage said to men, "Since you do not yet know man how can you know God? Since you do not comprehend life how can you comprehend death?" Some of us believe—I believe—that eyes turned from phantom gods have caught glimpses of a divine life in the evolution of nature, and the mystical movement of the heart of man. Already some have listened deep, and heard a sweet music to which the ages keep time, and man ever marches to a happy destiny. The universe is the shrine of Reason; it is the abode of

Love; it is the Temple of Conscience. These we have derived from it, and from us they shall return to it in that perfect trust which no surrounding darkness can extinguish, not even the darkness of the grave. But it is with these our larger hope is ascending. We know that Reason has hardly begun to tell its story, that Love has been drooping in the dungeon of fear, and Conscience hardly awakened from the drugs of superstition. They have yet to fulfil their career in religion which has so long denied them. They can find their freedom and fulness only in the unity of mankind. Of old the races streamed out through the earth, like pulses from the heart of Nature, that every member of the body might be fed from a common life; and though member has warred with member, still has their secret life centred in that one heart. Now let the day of harmony dawn! Now let member co-operate with member, and nation say to nation, "I have need of thee!"

What! some may say, have these half-civilised people in the East, who have no railways or telegraphs, any contribution to religion which we have need of? Ask Philology what it has got from their languages,—from Zend, Pàli, Sanskrit, spoken there when their people were much more barbarous. Science will enter a new kingdom by doorway of a beetle. The very thing we all have need

to get rid of is this same conceit about our own religious condition. There was a day when even learned men believed this little earth was the centre of things: when the earth lost that conceit of its own importance man gained a universe. And when we feel that Christianity is but one race's sect among others, some of which are more important, we shall enter into a spiritual Cosmos, under which all sects will sink and all souls arise. All this points to the future. Christianity, Mohammedanism, all sects, are powerless to rule or name the coming day because they have no supreme faith in it; their largest hope for all coming days is that they may duplicate the days that are gone, or carry them backward in closer retrogressive resemblance to the Year One of Crescent or Cross. Their most refined statements bring the past to dim our hope of prophets nobler than theirs, to be born of the enthusiasm of humanity. To cast away their authority is the first essential step towards turning our face to the sunrise. While Science, Art, Civilisation are bending all their eyes forward, this anomaly that religion shall ever look backward cannot last. The highest religion of to-day is to look and labour for a nobler day.

Nor can I think that new day so distant. For this matter the world of men means mainly all those who think. The thinkers of the world are but thinly

divided by veils of language and tricks of expression; speedily will they pierce these and discover that round the world hearts beat with one moral blood, and eyes see by one and the same sunlight. And as thought moves so will the most motionless masses gravitate; and every sect in the world be subtly consumed through and through by that popular disgust of bigotry and hypocrisy which will emanate from the fairly awakened conscience and intellect of Humanity.